DANIEL AND REVELATION COMMITTEE SERIES

Volume 6

Symposium on Revelation

Introductory and Exegetical Studies

Book 1

Editor
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Silver Spring, MD 20904

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Transliteration of Hebrew and Greek Alphabets

1. Hebrew Alphabet

Consonants

א = ʾ

ב = *b*

ב = *b̲*

ג = *g*

ג = *g̲*

ד = *d*

ד = *d̲*

ה = *h*

ו = *w*

ז = *ʒ*

ג = *g̲*

ד = *d*

ד = *d̲*

ה = *h*

ו = *w*

ז = *z*

ח = *ḥ*

ט = *ṭ*

י = *y*

כ = *k*

כ = *k̲*

י = *y*

כ = *k*

כ = *k̲*

ל = *l*

מ = *m*

כ = *k̲*

ל = *l*

מ = *m*

נ = *n*

ס = *s*

ע = ʿ

פ = *p*

פ = *p̲*

צ = *ṣ*

ק = *q*

ר = *r*

שׂ = *ś*

שׁ = *š*

ת = *t*

ת = *t̲*

Masoretic Vowel Pointings

ר = *r*

שׂ = *ś*

שׁ = *š*

ת = *t*

תּ = *t*

Masoretic Vowel Pointings

ַ = *a*

ָ = *ā*

ֽ = *s*

תּ = *t*

ת = *t*

Masoretic Vowel Pointings

ַ = *a*

ָ = *ā*

ֲ = *a*

ֱ = *e*

ֵ = *ē*

ְ (vocal shewa) = *a*

ָ = *ā*

ֲ = *a*

ֱ = *e*

ֵ = *ē*

ְ (vocal shewa) = *e*

ֵ ֵ = *ê*

ִ = *i*

ִ = *î*

ָ = *o*

ֹ = *ō*

ָ = *o*

ֹ = *ô*

ֻ = *u*

ֻ = *û*

2. Greek Alphabet

α = *a*

β = *b*

γ = *g*

δ = *d*

2. Greek Alphabet

α = *a*

β = *b*

γ = *g*

δ = *d*

ε = *e*

ζ = *z*

η = *ē*

θ = *th*

ϐ = *b*

γ = *g*

δ = *d*

ε = *e*

ζ = *z*

η = *ē*

θ = *th*

ι = *i*

κ = *k*

λ = *l*

μ = *m*

ν = *n*

ξ = *x*

ο = *o*

π = *p*

ρ = *r*

σ = *s*

τ = *t*

υ = *u*

φ = *ph*

χ = *ch*

ψ = *ps*

ω = *ō*

ʻ = *h*

Abbreviations

AA	*The Acts of the Apostles*
AB	Anchor Bible
AUSS	*Andrews University Seminary Studies*
Bib	*Biblica*
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
DA	*The Desire of Ages*
DARCOM	Daniel and Revelation Committee
DNTT	*Dictionary of New Testament Theology*
EvQ	*Evangelical Quarterly*
GC	*The Great Controversy*
IB	*Interpreter's Bible*
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IDB	*Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*
IEJ	*Israel Exploration Journal*
Int	*Interpretation*
JATS	*Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JTC	*Journal for Theology and the Church*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
LXX	Septuagint
NASB	*New American Standard Bible*
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
PP	*Patriarchs and Prophets*
RB	*Revue biblique*
RevExp	*Review and Expositor*
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
TDNT	*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Kittel and Friedrich, eds.
TZ	*Theologische Zeitschrift*
ZA	*Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

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To the Reader

With its publication of a two-book symposium on Revelation, the Committee concludes nearly a decade of ongoing study that first focused on issues in Daniel, Leviticus, and Hebrews. In recent years the Committee has given its time almost exclusively to matters pertaining to the book of Revelation. *Symposium on Revelation* (books 1 and 2) is numbered as volumes 6 and 7 in the DARCOM Series.

Interest in the meaning of the book of Revelation is widespread among many Christian groups. Critical scholarship relegates its symbolic messages to events occurring in the first century Judaism and the Roman Empire. But many conservative Christians have embraced some form of futurist interpretation that removes the fulfillment of the bulk of the prophecies from the Christian Era to the last seven years of the age—embellished with such beliefs as a secret rapture of the church, the conversion of the Jews, an individual antichrist, and a 3½ year period of tribulation.

Living in such a religious climate, Seventh-day Adventists have not escaped the influence of these schools of interpretation upon their own understanding of Bible prophecy. The committee's original assignment involved challenges that came from preterist/higher critical perspectives. But more recently, views are being promoted that involve dual fulfillments of selected prophecies in Daniel and Revelation or other schemes of interpretation, resulting in variant forms of futurism.

We do not question the sincerity of those who develop different systems to probe the mysteries of apocalyptic prophecy, and we encourage earnest study of the Scriptures by every member. Nevertheless, preterist or futurist forms of interpretation can only weaken the historically-based foundation of Daniel and Revelation on which Seventh-day Adventist self-understanding rests. This is not an arbitrary matter with us. Seventh-day Adventists are historicist interpreters of these prophecies because we believe Jesus and the biblical data itself point us to that method of interpretation as the only correct method to use.

In the light of the current interest several chapters in these new volumes examine the arguments for interpretations grounded in the assumption of dual fulfillments in apocalyptic prophecy. One chapter in particular examines the view that projects the time periods of Daniel 12 and Revelation 13 to future end-time fulfillments.

Sound principles of interpretation are essential to a correct understanding of the ancient Scriptures. This is especially true of the book of Revelation because its symbolism is foreign to our modern mind-set. The first six chapters of book 1 are directed toward establishing such principles. Since the writings of Ellen G. White are often cited as authority for views she herself never held, two chapters and an appendix article deal with her understanding of these prophecies. Guidelines are suggested to avoid the misuse of this important source of biblical understanding.

The exegetical section of book 1 deals with different aspects of the obscure series of the seals (4:1–8:1) and the trumpets (8:1–11:18). The central question of whether the seals and trumpets are fulfilled in sequences across the Christian Era up to and including the end, or whether both series find fulfillment (or a dual fulfillment) only in the end-time is evaluated in harmony with the Scripture indicators.

Presentations on the seals and on the vision of Revelation 10 (part of the interlude in the trumpet series) appear in this volume. The Committee did not wish to foster unnecessary speculations on the very obscure trumpet series. It chose not to print samples of historicist interpretations. Limiting its published expression to the biblical evidence that clearly locates both the seals and trumpets in historical, probationary time, the Committee would encourage continued study within these parameters.

Once more, we acknowledge our appreciation for the scholars and invitees who have assisted the committee in its task, especially the writers whose essays appear in this volume:

Richard M. Davidson — Jon Paulien
Richard Lehmann — George E. Rice
Beatrice Neall — William H. Shea
Kenneth A. Strand

Daniel and Revelation Committee
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

I

Introductory Studies

Principles of Interpretation
Literary Structure
Symbolism and Typology
Daniel/Revelation Relationships
Ellen White's Use of Apocalyptic
Interpreter's Use of the Ellen White Writings

Chapter I

Foundational Principles of Interpretation

Kenneth A. Strand

Editorial Synopsis. Conservative Christians firmly believe that the Bible's message transcends its time and culture. Consequently, as the years pass and the gulf of centuries widens between the ancient and modern worlds, it becomes increasingly important for students of the Scriptures to adhere strictly to sound principles of interpretation lest they misconstrue God's Word. This is especially true when it comes to discovering the truths couched in the symbols of the apocalyptic books of Daniel and Revelation.

In this important chapter the author spells out the characteristics of apocalyptic prophecy, draws out the purpose and theme of the book of Revelation, explores the nature of its symbolism, and points the way to determine its meaning.

All systems of interpreting Revelation must begin by locating its several segments in past, present, or future time frames. After years of study, it is the present author's deep conviction that a clear understanding of the literary arrangement of Revelation provides the necessary foundation on which to erect a sound interpretation of its visions. The prophetic book itself supplies the keys to explain its structure.

The data indicates that Revelation is composed of eight visions internally linked to form four pairs. The prophecy divides naturally into two sections, chapters 1–14 and chapters 15–22. Four visions precede this natural dividing line (close of chapter 14), and four visions conclude the book. The first four visions (historical series) find fulfillment in the Christian Era leading up at their end to the Second Advent. The last four visions (eschatological—judgment series) cover events after the close of human probation. Because a correct understanding of the organization of Revelation is so vital to the interpretation of its visions, the next two chapters will also treat this subject in some detail.

Chapter Outline

I. Interpretational Approaches to Revelation
II. Exegesis, Theology, and Hermeneutic
III. General Rules of Interpretation
IV. Special Rules for Apocalyptic Interpretation
V. Purpose and Theme of Revelation
VI. Literary Structure of Revelation

The book of Revelation has been misunderstood and mistreated more than any other book of the Bible. Even a cursory glance at the large number of commentaries on Revelation reveals a phenomenally wide array of misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and conclusions that are not only contradictory but frequently also highly speculative. In stark contrast to the profusion of expository material on the Apocalypse is the virtual lack of treatment of the book's rich theology. To date, there exists no full-fledged, comprehensive treatment of the theology of the book of Revelation, and even discussions of specific limited theological motifs or themes in Revelation are relatively rare and frequently both perfunctory and unreliable.[1]

Interpretational Approaches to Revelation

Commentaries on the Revelation are classified generally into several major categories: historicism, preterism, and futurism.

Historicism. The historical method may take either of two basic approaches: (1) The "straight-line" approach sees Revelation portraying a sequence of events that begins in the Apostolic Era and continues on step by step until the grand eschatological climax.[2] (2) The "recapitulation" approach interprets the various visions in Revelation as going over the same ground from the prophet's own day until the end-time. This latter type of interpretation has been standard for Seventh-day Adventists.[3] In either case the prophecies are understood to meet their fulfillments in historical time between the days of John and the establishment of the eternal kingdom.

Preterism. On the other hand preterism has tended to interpret either the entire book of Revelation or virtually all of it as ancient history. Most preterist scholars look upon the prophecies of the Apocalypse as reflecting events and conditions relating to the Christian church and Roman Empire in John's own time, possibly reaching also a short while beyond that time to embrace things anticipated by John. There are, however, a few expositions of preterism that would allow prophecies of the Apocalypse to reach as far as Constantine the Great in the early fourth century, with the section from 19:11 onward possibly belonging to a later period that is still future in our own day.[4]

Futurism. The futurist system of interpretation sees the fulfillment of most of Revelation restricted to a short period of time still future to our own day.

A subclass of futurism—one into which most futurists and even most evangelicals fall—is that of pretribulationism/dispensationalism.[5] This particular approach normally interprets Revelation 4:1–19:10 as occurring in a seven-year period still future to us—a period beginning with a "secret" rapture and marked at its close by the glorious visible appearing of Christ. The pretribulationists/dispensationalists consider this seven-year period as the seventieth week of years of the prophecy of Daniel 9:24–27, although the sixty-ninth week concluded in the early Christian Era.[6]

Other approaches. In addition to the three major schools of interpretation and their subdivisions, there are a variety of other interpretational approaches to Revelation in vogue today. Some of these overlap or embrace in part one or more of the traditional approaches, but all tend to place their main emphasis in some other direction. There are, for instance, various *a* historical interpretations. These view the Apocalypse as portraying a mythological drama, marvelous ideals, value philosophy, or something of similar sort, without touching real history and/or genuine eschatology at all.[7]

Finally, it should be noted that in recent years there has been a trend toward amalgamation of approaches. Perhaps most notable along this line are attempts to blend preterism into futurism, with the former a backdrop to the latter (for example, George Eldon Ladd and Leon Morris) or to reinterpret historicism into a futuristic mode (particularly noticeable in expositions by some Seventh-day Adventists who are presently publishing their private views.

It is not my purpose in this chapter to illustrate further or to evaluate the various approaches. This I have done briefly elsewhere with regard to the three traditional ones, something which also has been done by a number of other recent writers.[8] In due course, certain basic principles will be discussed that will aid the reader in sifting away unsound interpretational modes from what is sound and valid.

For the moment, it will suffice simply to point out that any approach based on external criteria and opinions (rather than emerging from the Apocalypse itself) should be considered highly suspect. In fact, the confusions so rampant in most commentaries, whatever their particular interpretational stance, find their root cause in *eisegesis*—that is, reading into the text something that *is not there*—rather than proceeding on the basis of sound *exegesis*—drawing out of the text what *is there*.

This *eisegetic* pitfall reveals itself in a number of ways. These often seem plausible because they appear to utilize the valid interpretational principle of comparing scripture with scripture. The reader must keep in mind, however, that it is not the amount of Scripture quoted, referred to, or juxtaposed that really matters. What counts is the soundness of the procedure being used. According to 2 Peter 3:16 there were in the New Testament era those who wrested the Scriptures to "their own destruction." That practice, unfortunately, still is prevalent to a high degree in our day, and the interpreting of Revelation seems particularly prone to it.

Exegesis, Theology, and Hermeneutic

By way of introduction, we observe that there are both differences and commonalities between the exegetical and theological approaches to the book of Revelation. Exegesis deals with a specific text or passage and seeks to draw out the author's intended message in that particular text or passage. This involves all the concerns that an exegete normally has in dealing with any piece of literature (meaning of words, syntactical relationships, etc.), general historical and literary contexts, and whatever other information may shed light on the meaning of the passage, including relevant statements the author makes elsewhere.

Theological study utilizes the same tools and hermeneutical principles. But whereas exegetical study normally means the careful and sound examination of a *particular text or passage*, theological study usually encompasses the following:

First, it utilizes the exegetical results of a number of related texts or passages. Second, it seeks to place these in proper relationship with each other. Finally, it endeavors to relate this synthesis to broader scriptural evidences and expositions of the same theological motifs, themes, or perspectives (from both the Old and New Testaments).

Thus exegesis in Revelation asks the basic foundational question, What does this specific passage in the Apocalypse tell us? Theological study, on the other hand asks the broader question, What theological themes or motifs are illuminated and elucidated by this passage, and how does this book's presentation of these themes and motifs fit into the wider context of both New Testament theology and biblical theology as a whole?

Because of the kinds of misinterpretations of the Apocalypse that have been emerging in recent years, not only from non-Adventist writers but also within certain Adventist circles, we will first reiterate briefly the well-known and generally received principles of Bible interpretation. Then we will give more detailed attention to certain vitally important matters regarding Revelation that are all too often unknown or overlooked by present-day expositors. The present chapter will not overlap unduly what is presented elsewhere in the Daniel and Revelation Committee series on this topic, but the matter of a sound hermeneutic is so essential that some restatement may even be helpful.[9]

General Rules of Interpretation

The general rules for the interpretation of any Bible book obviously must also apply to the book of Revelation. Hence a few comments on these follow immediately below.

Scripture As Its Own Best Interpreter

Seventh-day Adventists firmly believe that Scripture is not of private interpretation but that holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:20–21). This fact of divine inspiration assures that Holy Scripture is totally reliable truth. It leads to the conclusion that Scripture is its own best interpreter, an interpretational principle already mentioned above.

Bible passages, however, must not be put together in a willy-nilly fashion. A sound approach takes into account the following facts: (1) The Scriptures are not only truth in an overall sense, but also contain *many individual truths*. (2) Therefore, in dealing with any Scripture passage it is important to ascertain precisely what that particular passage treats and what its own specific message is *in its own specific context*. (3) Whereas bringing together two or more Bible passages having relevance for the same topic will illumine our understanding of the divine truth that is involved, combining fallaciously two or more items that are absolutely true in themselves may very well lead to a synthesis that is wholly unsound and erroneous.

The last point needs particular emphasis. For instance, if we would attempt to merge a fully accurate biography of Augustus Caesar with a fully accurate biography of George Washington (each of these individuals was called "father of his country"), obviously we would have a combined account filled with error. So also would be the case if we were to intrude a factual account of Napoleon Bonaparte's military career into a factual account of the Second World War.

Playing loose in this fashion with individually true and thoroughly accurate pieces of historical information seems ludicrous, and surely it is so. Yet this very sort of methodology is paralleled today in certain interpretational schemes applied to the book of Revelation![10] Whether the field is general historiography or biblical studies (or for that matter, any other field), the end result is not truth, but confusion and error.

Diligent Study, Using All Available Tools

The Bereans are referred to as being "more noble" than the Thessalonians because they readily received the word of the apostles and then studied the Scriptures to determine whether the message of the apostles was true (Acts 17:11). The search for divine truth must be careful, diligent, and balanced.

Such study involves a proper comparing of scripture with scripture, taking care that as much knowledge as possible be gained from each Bible passage utilized. This suggests a serious and proper use of tools that are available: Bible concordances, Bible dictionaries, Bible handbooks, reference works on biblical history and archaeology, maps and treatments of the geography of the Bible lands, lexicons, and other helps with regard to the biblical languages. (If possible, the biblical text should be read in its original languages.)

Although we must be wary of what is simply human tradition—something which all too frequently includes error—we must recognize that the proper and judicious use of relevant historical and archaeological background source materials, lexicons, and similar helps can be most useful and illuminating in the search for and discovery of, scriptural truth.

Individuals who are lay persons to the various disciplines mentioned above should not despair. Reliable information is readily available to anyone willing to study. Whether such Bible students realize it or not, their very reading of Scripture in English or in another modern language carries indebtedness to scholars knowledgeable in the biblical languages and in historical and other relevant backgrounds to the Bible. Fortunately, too, there are available a number of Bible translations (at least in English) that can be compared with one another.

It is well to note at this juncture that Bible students who are genuinely searching for truth will not simply select translations or traditional wordings to meet their own fancy on disputed points. Rather, they will search for the preponderance of evidence as to what is correct.

Bible translations differ in choice of words and in manner of expression, yet divine truth is usually set forth in almost all translations so accurately and adequately that no one need go astray—at least not on matters vital to salvation.

It is true, however, that some translations are in general more trustworthy than others. As a rule, a translation of the more "literal" kind should be preferred over the "free" or "paraphrastic" type.[11] Often people will speak of the latter kind of translation (exemplified, for example, by the Living Bible) as what they prefer, because such a translation "is so clear." The real question, though, should be this: In these *free* translations, what is it that is so clear—the word of God, or the opinion of the translator?

Willingness to Do God's Will

Another general rule of interpretation relates to the reader's attitude toward truth. As stated by our Lord, "if any man's will is to do his [God's] will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God" (John 7:17).

The book of Revelation itself is most forceful in emphasizing that nothing should be added to and nothing taken away from what is written therein. Indeed, pronounces a blessing on those who heed the book's message, and a curse on those who distort it (see Rev 1:3; 22:7b, 18–19).

Prayerful Study

Prayerful study of the Scriptures is a principle of utmost importance. The same Holy Spirit who inspired the Bible writers to record divine truth must also be present to illumine our minds to that truth. This particular principle could have been stated first amoung our general principles because of its extreme importance. I have chosen to place it at the conclusion instead, for it embraces all the others when it is undertaken conscientiously.

Prayerful study means study that uses a sound method in comparing scripture with scripture, that takes advantage of all available tools in doing diligent study, and is characterized by a willingness to do God's will and follow the results of one's study wherever they may lead.

Special Rules for Apocalyptic Interpretation

Impact of Literary Form

Bible truth is many-faceted and the Bible writers have utilized a great variety of literary types in order to convey the divine message. It is fundamental to recognize that truth expressed through a particular literary form displays the characteristics of that form and is understood only when due consideration is given to those characteristics. Historical narratives, legal prescriptions, wisdom sayings, letters, poetic reflections and acclamations are among the numerous and varied types of literature included in the Bible. They appear also at times in combination with one another.

For most readers, the difference between prose and poetry is perhaps easiest to recognize. For example, in the prose account of the Exodus we are told that God sent "a strong east wind" to drive back the waters of the sea (Exod 14:21). In the poetic account the statement is made that "at the blast of thy [God's] nostrils the waters piled up" (Exod 15:8).

The figurativeness of the poetic expression is immediately apparent. Most readers would not visualize God as actually crouching on hands and knees and snorting through His nostrils at the waters of the sea! And yet, that picturesque description adds legitimate emphasis and effectiveness in setting forth a divine truth when it is read properly as the figurative language that it is.

The book of Revelation represents a type of literature and style unique among the books of the New Testament. Its closest Bible parallel is the Old Testament book of Daniel. These two Bible books generally are classified as "apocalyptic prophecy," in contrast to "classical prophecy" (sometimes called "general prophecy"), the latter being represented by such books as the major and minor prophets.

Both kinds of prophetic literature teach divine truth, as do all the other kinds of literature in the Bible. But just as in the case of the other literary types, the characteristics peculiar to this kind of literature must be taken into account by the student. Unfortunately, the distinction between classical and apocalyptic prophecy is frequently blurred by Bible expositors.

In the paragraphs below, we will first note briefly some of the more generally recognized characteristics of apocalyptic. Then we will deal in more detail with some features of this literature that usually are not given due consideration.

Generally Recognized Features of Apocalyptic

Various authors have pointed out features common to the genre of literature known as apocalyptic. The following list, based largely on my *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, may be considered representative:[12]

Striking contrasts. Apocalyptic prophecy makes a clear and invariable line of demarcation between good and evil, between God's forces and Satan's forces, between the righteous and the wicked, between salvation for God's children and doom for their enemies. Among the numerous striking opposites in the book of Revelation are the seal of God and the mark of the beast, the faithful and true witness and the serpent that deceives the world, the virgin of Revelation 12 and the harlot of Revelation 17, the armies of heaven and the armies of earth, the fruit of the tree of life and the wine of the fury of God's wrath, the New Jerusalem in glorious splendor and Babylon in flaming destruction, and the sea of glass and the lake of fire.

Cosmic sweep. Classical prophecy deals with the local and contemporary situation as its primary focus, with a certain degree of broadening to depict a final great day of the Lord. Apocalyptic has instead, as its very warp and woof, the element of cosmic sweep or universal scope. Apocalyptic prophecy approaches the great controversy between good and evil, not within a local and contemporary historical framework (such as depicted in the messages of the major and minor prophets), but from the vantage point that draws aside the curtain, as it were, on the *entire world* for the *whole span* of human history.

For example, Daniel 2 and 7 treat world empires in succession for the remainder of earth's history from Daniel's time until the final consummation and setting up of God's everlasting kingdom. Revelation likewise scans major historical developments from John's day up to and including a portrayal of the grand eschatological finale.

Eschatological emphasis. At times the general prophets broaden the scope of the doom oracles or "day-of-the-Lord judgments"—whether directed against Israel, Judah, Nineveh, Babylon, Moab, Edom, or whatever entity it might be—to portray briefly a final judgment at the end of earth's history. However, the major thrust of their writing is for the situation of their own day.

On the other hand apocalyptic prophecy, although it treats history down through the stream of time, has a particular focus on the end-time events. Apocalyptic describes an ongoing struggle between good and evil in history, a history that tends to degenerate as it proceeds in time, But it is a history that is actually moving toward an end at which time God Himself will directly intervene to destroy evil and establish righteousness.

In a sense we may say that the general prophets looked upon history from the standpoint of their own position in time, whereas the apocalyptic prophets envisage a sweep of history with a special focus on history's eventual climax.

Origin in times of distress and perplexity. In its historical setting, biblical apocalyptic such as Daniel and Revelation arose in times of distress, perplexity, and persecution. Thus, it appears that Apocalyptic prophecy emerges when dire circumstances for God's people might well lead them to question whether God is still active and in control. And it teaches clearly and forcefully that God is indeed still the master of history, that He is with His people, and that He will fully vindicate them at a grand and glorious eschatological climax. Apocalyptic prophecy is a kind of literature that is particularly suited to give comfort and hope to oppressed and downtrodden servants of God in their time of critical need for precisely such comfort and hope.

Basis in visions and dreams. A comparison of apocalyptic prophecy with classical prophecy and other biblical literature indicates that apocalyptic is characterized by more frequent reference to visions and dreams than is true of any other kind of literature found in the Bible. Also, the appearance of angels to interpret such visions and dreams is not uncommon.

Extensive use of symbolism. Although classical prophecy uses symbolism to some degree, apocalyptic may be distinguished by it. The book of Revelation is permeated with symbols of various sorts; its imagery is particularly rich.

Use of composite symbolism. Moreover, whatever symbolism the classical prophets use, it tends to follow true-to-life patterns, whereas apocalyptic often departs from conventional forms. It depicts, for example, animals that are nonexistent in nature, such as the seven-headed dragon and the sea beast of Revelation, the winged lion and the four-headed leopard of Daniel, etc. Composite symbolism was common, of course, in the art and literature of the ancient Near East.

Summary. Although classification on the basis of such criteria has been called into question,[13] most scholars still give weight to these elements as being basic characteristics of apocalyptic prophecy. In any event, the simple fact is that there is a body of ancient literature that manifests to a greater or lesser degree most of these elements; therefore, for descriptive and utilitarian purposes a classification on the basis of them seems both useful and warranted. Knowing and understanding such special characteristics of apocalyptic is, of course, a first step in proper interpretation.

It should be noted, too, that all the characteristics set forth above are not necessarily completely unique to apocalyptic. The extent to which they appear and the manner in which they are used in apocalyptic is, however, quite distinctive and serves to provide a significant contrast to the dynamic evidenced in classical prophecy.

Vertical and Horizontal Continuity

As useful as the foregoing list of characteristics is, it does not get us fully to the "heart" of apocalyptic prophecy. We may not be able to understand and appreciate it sufficiently unless we can put aside our "twentieth century glasses" and place ourselves squarely within the biblical perspective.

Here we turn our attention specifically to two elements absolutely vital to understand if we are to grasp the true dynamic of apocalyptic. I will refer to them as the dimensions of "vertical continuity" and "horizontal continuity."

Vertical continuity. The ancient Semitic mind saw heaven and earth in close touch with each other. Unfortunately, this is a perspective that we in our modern science-oriented civilization have largely lost. The modern mind tends to separate heaven and earth, not simply spatially or physically, but also spiritually. Even as Christians, we find ourselves too often out of touch with the frames of reference and conceptualizations characteristic of the Bible writers and their original hearers.

God communicates, of course, through the language of humanity. This obviously means more than vocabulary, syntax, and the like. It involves the whole conceptual framework of the persons with whom the communication is being established.

We moderns believe that our twentieth century scientific frames of reference are much better than the conceptualizations of the ancients, and undoubtedly in some ways ours are more "up to date" and accurate. However, whether the world-view is an ancient one or a modern one, it falls far below the ultimate realities of God's universe. His condescension to communicate with us in our language—through our conceptual framework—is so great that any human difference created by two or three millennia makes virtually no difference.

It is *for us*, however, that the Bible was written in ancient times. Therefore, those frames of reference pertinent to the ancient writers and hearers must be borne in mind by us as we seek to understand God's message today through His written word.[14]

While modern *scientific* conceptualizations of reality have provided some important gains or correctives, at other times they have led to serious loss. Empirical *scientific* verification is simply not possible for all spheres of reality (in fact, may be limited to a rather small part of total reality, as scientists themselves are coming more and more to realize). I suggest that one of the greatest losses from the ancient Semitic conceptualization of reality is this matter we are considering: the "vertical continuity" that sees heaven and earth in close touch with each other.

This "vertical continuity" is basic to, and axiomatic for, the entire biblical corpus, both Old and New Testaments. Nowhere is it more prominently displayed, however, than in apocalyptic. It is not without reason, for instance, that the book of Revelation repeatedly presents heavenly settings in connection with its description of activities that take place on earth. Actually, apocalyptic prophecy *pictorializes* and *dramatizes* this vital element of the biblical perspective.

The essence and importance of this concept of "vertical continuity" as applicable to the messages of the book of Revelation, has been aptly expressed in the following beautiful words penned by Ellen White: "One thing will certainly be understood from the study of Revelation—that the connection between God and His people is close and decided."[15]

If we are to grasp the real beauty and receive the efficacy of God's messages to us in His Word, we must return to this concept of reality that puts heaven in close spiritual touch with earth. This truth is crucial for our understanding of the messages of the apocalyptic books of Daniel and Revelation.

Horizontal continuity. The second central feature of apocalyptic, the dimension of "horizontal continuity," also needs careful consideration. Just as apocalyptic prophecy pictorializes and dramatizes a vertical continuity of activity between heaven and earth, so it also pictorializes and dramatizes a horizontal continuity in its forward outlook. History is a *continuum* under God's control, moving ever closer to that glorious consummation when God's own kingdom of righteousness will be established for eternity.

This particular type of prophetic forecast *that delineates developments within a historical continuum* is a feature that stands in striking contrast to classical prophecy. As already mentioned, the latter focuses on the prophet's own time, and then may offer an expansion for a further and broader fulfillment of cosmic scope at the end of the age. It is proper, therefore, to speak in a certain sense of the two focal points or "two foci" of classical prophecy.

In contrast, apocalyptic prophecy does not proceed on this basis at all. Rather, apocalyptic prophecy sees a *continuum*, a progression or sequence in history. It does not look simply upon two focal points—the prophet's time and the end of time—with a gap between. The apocalyptic style is clearly illustrated, for example, in the sequences of the image scene of Daniel 2 and the four beasts and their horns of Daniel 7.

But this sort of apocalyptic approach to history is not unique with Daniel. The extracanonical apocalypses have indications of the same. For instance, the brief "Apocalypse of Weeks" in Ethiopic Enoch 91:12–17 and 93:1–10 divides history into 10 successive periods, the last one embracing the final judgment and introducing the eternal age. Another illustration is Baruch's parable in chapters 53–74, of a thundercloud which rains down clear and inky waters in some 12 alternately bright and dark periods, finally reaching the eschatological consummation. And there are a number of other examples as well, including the vision of the multi-winged eagle in 4 Ezra, chapters 11–12, and the dream-vision of bulls and sheep (plus a wide array of other animals) in Ethiopic Enoch, chapters 85–90.

Sequential historical developments or processes are also apparent in the divinely inspired book of Revelation. We may certainly think of the striking examples within the sequences of the seven seals and of the seven trumpets, the seals being broken *in succession* and the trumpets being blown *in succession*. Likewise, the depiction of the animosity of the dragon in chapter 12 embraces a sequence, for *he first* attacks the Man-child, *then* the woman, and *finally* the remnant of the woman's offspring. Also indicative of this same sort of sequential perspective is the reference in 17:10 to the seven heads of the beast as being *seven kings*, of whom five "have fallen," "one is [in John's time]," and "the other has not yet come."

We have purposely placed emphasis on this "horizontal-continuity" dimension of apocalyptic, for two reasons: (1) It is absolutely central to the apocalyptic portrayal of history as a succession of events, and (2) in recent writings by certain prominent evangelical scholars (such as G. E. Ladd and Leon Morris), the apocalyptic view of history has been confused with the classical-prophecy approach of "dual fulfillment" or "two foci."

For example, Ladd sets forth the idea that the book of Revelation envisages the leopardlike sea beast of chapter 13 as a symbol of both the ancient Roman Empire of John's day (preterism) and an Antichrist still to come (futurism).[16] But this kind of two-focal-points interpretational procedure wrongfully transposes the characteristics of one type of prophetic portrayal to another type, where it simply does not fit. In fact, when the dual-foci pattern is imposed on the apocalyptic books of Daniel and Revelation, it brings distortion to the very messages God intends to convey in these prophecies.

Classical prophecy, with its emphasis on the prophet's own day and an occasional "two-foci" perspective, never elaborates on the events *leading up to* the final great "day of the Lord." There is, for example, no reference in classical prophecy to an upcoming, end-time Antichrist power. Ladd arrives at this sort of Antichrist, as we have noted, by wrongly imposing the two-foci classical-prophecy modality upon Revelation where Antichrist is indeed found. *But*, in Revelation (and Daniel as well) the Antichrist appears within a totally different frame of reference, namely, within a *historical continuum*, as a segment of Revelation's ongoing *horizontal continuity*.

In short, the very nature of apocalyptic prophecy rules out preterism, futurism, and any combination of them, in favor of the historicist approach. This fact is vital and has important theological implications for our study of the Apocalypse.

One further point may need some clarification here: Why does this concept of historical continuum emerge in apocalyptic in distinction from the "two foci" concept of classical prophecy? I suggest that a specific background from the biblical literature itself serves as the pattern for this characteristic of apocalyptic, namely, the Old Testament historical narratives. Apocalyptic prophecy projects into the future a continuation of the Bible's historical record.

God's sovereignty and constant care for His people are always in the forefront of the Bible's portrayal of the historical continuum, whether it is depicted in past events (historical books) or in events to come (apocalyptic prophecy). Both Daniel and Revelation reveal a divine overlordship and mastery regarding the onward movement of history beyond the prophet's own time—a future history that will culminate when the God of heaven establishes His own eternal kingdom that will fill the whole earth and stand forever.[17]

In brief, the most notable of the generally recognized characteristics of apocalyptic is its use of symbolism. There is obviously a heightened emphasis on this feature, and many of the symbols are composite in nature. Moreover, the symbolisms reflect the striking contrasts so evident in apocalyptic, and they frequently give evidence of broad or cosmic scope.

Determining the source of the symbols employed, ascertaining their range of meaning, and their particular focus in the immediate context of Revelation are vital considerations for the interpreter. The topic is discussed elsewhere in this volume.[18]

Undoubtedly the most misunderstood and misused facet of apocalyptic relates to its horizontal continuity. Most of the generally recognized characteristics of apocalyptic appear at times in other prophetic literature in the Bible. But apocalyptic prophecy's horizontal continuity is a characteristic that stands in sharp contrast to the approach to history given in classical prophecy.

Theological interpretation of Revelation, in order to be sound, must be compatible with this historical perspective. Revelation embraces, as does the book of Daniel, a step-by-step progression through history, not a polarized focus on either the ancient period or the eschatological climax or both. Those commentators who wish to combine preterism and futurism as the best approach to Revelation fly right in the face of the very nature of the book itself as an apocalypse.[19] It is vital that we be true to the actual historical perspective of Revelation if we are to derive correct conclusions about this book's important messages.

Special Questions

At this juncture, two special questions arise, especially in view of what has been said above about apocalyptic's "horizontal continuity": (1) In apocalyptic prophecy, is there such a thing as *repeated fulfillments*? (2) Does the historical portrayal in apocalyptic envisage a tentativeness or *conditionality*, so that if conditions were to change, the historical fulfillments would likewise change?

Repeated fulfillments? In previous discussions on apocalyptic I have noted that there is a certain "philosophy-of-history" perspective in this kind of prophecy.[20] By "philosophy-of-history," however, I do not mean the "value-philosophy" approach that sets forth philosophical considerations or "ideals" without touching historical reality. It must be emphasized that apocalyptic prophecy deals with *real events and developments* in the historical continuum, from the prophet's time onward to the end of time. Any approach that divorces fulfillment of apocalyptic forecasts from real history goes contrary to the very essence of apocalyptic historical portrayal.

The kind of "philosophy-of-history" to which I call attention has a certain kind of recurring application. We will first look for evidences and/or illustrations of the phenomenon; and second, we will note the type of material to which the phenomenon is applicable.

Although the evidence is not so clear-cut, this kind of literature does contain some indications of the concept that "history repeats itself."

In the noncanonical apocalypses, for example, Baruch's parable of the thundercloud divides its historical continuum into *alternately* "clear" and "inky" periods. There is, indeed, an almost "sing-song" pattern of historical repetition. In the canonical book of Daniel, the rise and fall of kingdoms conveys the same thought with regard to repetitiveness in history, especially so in view of the undergirding statement that God "removes kings and sets up kings" (Dan 2:21).

The concept is expressive of the "blessings-and-cursings" formulary of Deuteronomy (27–28) and finds graphic illustration in Israel's own history. This is well illustrated, for example, in the book of Judges. Whenever Israel failed in its covenant commitment, oppression by foreign nations resulted. Deliverance came whenever Israel turned to the Lord in sincere repentance. Although each instance was a different episode, with a different judge leading the deliverance, the *kind* of historical phenomenon in each case was the same. Thus, it may be said that Israelite "history repeated itself" in *principle*, though not in specific detail.

In the book of Revelation we find similar suggestions of repetitive patterns, such as in the four-three division within various septets. One may think, for example, of the striking similarities found in the letters to Ephesus and Sardis and again in those to Smyrna and Philadelphia (the first and fifth churches and the second and sixth churches, respectively, in Revelation 2–3).

Furthermore, the very manner in which symbolism is used in Revelation implies at times a *repeated* (and possibly a *continuous*) application. Particularly impressive is the expression in Revelation 11:8—"the great city which is allegorically called Sodom and Egypt, where their [the two witnesses'] Lord was crucified." Here we find three places (Sodom, Egypt, Jerusalem) brought together and *identified* in such a way as to carry our minds back to events both in the *distant past* and in *much closer time*. These events were also separated geographically.

What this text tells us is not that there is going to be a second or even a third fulfillment of Sodom or multiple fulfillments of the ancient Egypt that held Israel in oppression. Rather, the message is that these three distinct entities can be identified in a sort of "togetherness" as to their underlying character of wickedness and oppression. Hence, they can fittingly serve in a *symbolic* way for the "great city" that embodies and repeats a similar character of wickedness and oppression.

Ellen White, too, in commenting on John's vision, makes some statements indicative of this kind of historical repetition. We may notice, for instance, this statement: "Looking down through long centuries of darkness and superstition, the aged exile saw multitudes suffering martyrdom because of their love for the truth. But he saw also that He who sustained His early witnesses would not forsake His faithful followers during the centuries of persecution that they must pass through before the close of time."[21]

When claims are made that Ellen White supports repeated fulfillments in the books of Daniel and Revelation,[22] the context of what she says must be carefully noted and what sort of "repetition of history" is involved. There is not a single instance where she indicates dual or multiple fulfillments of the little horn or of any of the beasts of Daniel or Revelation and their time periods.

Those entities come into existence once and once only. Their kind of service as vehicles for Satan's attack upon God and God's saints may readily, however, lead to a *repetition of the general processes* used, whether these are deceptions or persecutions (see John 8:44). But no apocalyptic prophecy is understood to embody dual or multiple fulfillments in itself.

Conditionality in apocalyptic? In recent private writings among some Seventh-day Adventists, the claim is made that there is conditionality in the historical forecasts of apocalyptic books such as Revelation. The argument is that such fulfillments as Seventh-day Adventists have long held as genuine were only partial ones—if fulfillments at all—because certain conditions were not met. Hence, we can look for a yet-future fulfillment. Items that have been placed in this category are the great earthquake, Dark Day, and falling of the stars (Rev 6:12–17), the end of Daniel's 2300-day prophecy in 1844, other time periods in Daniel and Revelation, and the apocalyptic portrayal of history even more generally.

What must be said first in response to this approach is that the principles enunciated above regarding historical portrayal in apocalyptic prophecy hold true for this question as well as for that of "repeated fulfillment." Those principles allow no room whatever for default in the fulfillment or postponement of the apocalyptic forecast because of conditionality.

In short, apocalyptic prophecy sets forth a historical progression that allows no room for variability, as God foretells what "*must* shortly come to pass" (Rev 1:1, KJV). There is, for example, no question whether the four horsemen of Revelation 6 are going to ride; they will *indeed* go forth in the progression indicated. The same holds true with the trumpet warnings, the plagues of doom, the destruction of Babylon, etc. These are all things that John is shown and told *would happen*. There simply is no element of contingency involved!

One may argue, however, that there is an element of conditionality in the letters to the seven churches. This is indeed so. The whole concept of these letters has conditionality as an underlying frame of reference. But this particular conditionality *does not relate to the historical portrayal* of the churches' situations, but to how the churches and individuals in them will respond to Christ's appeal, how they will *decide to stand in the future* regarding their covenant relationship with the Lord.

The hortatory nature of epistolary literature comes to the fore here. The fact that the book of Revelation is a letter as well as an apocalyptic prophecy gives it a certain flavor of exhortation. But this exhortation, it must be emphasized, is limited to *appeals* (wherever found in the book, see 16:15, for an example) and does not apply to the specific type of prophetic forecast that is part and parcel of the nature of apocalyptic literature. The book of Daniel, too, has elements of conditionality in its historical sections and in any appeals that are made.

However, in neither Daniel nor Revelation is the prophetic forecast itself subject to conditionality. The events are fixed and the prescribed time periods are definite and invariable. These elements fit the patterns of what Daniel said to King Nebuchadnezzar: "God has made known to the king what *shall be* hereafter. The dream is *certain*, and its interpretation *sure*" (Dan 2:45).

Symbolism in Revelation

As noted earlier, among the general characteristics of apocalyptic prophecy is its extensive use of symbolism, especially composite symbolism. The book of Revelation is filled with symbolism and imagery, a fact that causes much consternation and confusion to interpreters. Part of the problem is that modern expositors frequently interject their own meanings onto the symbols, rather than determining the scriptural range of meaning.

As one surveys the Revelation, it becomes evident that the vast majority of its allusions in symbolism and imagery are to the Old Testament.[23] This subject is addressed in detail in another chapter of this volume. At this point we will simply add some comments on a few other considerations.

Symbolism's literary role. A valid rule of Scripture interpretation is that a given passage should be interpreted literally unless there is evidence of symbolic or figurative language present. For most biblical literature this principle works well. But when confronted by apocalyptic prophecy, we must recognize in this kind of literature a preponderance of symbolic usage. Thus, our approach may have to be turned around somewhat so as to find reasons for a literal interpretation of many passages.

In any case, there are specific considerations we should keep in mind when we ask, Why is there so much symbolism in apocalyptic prophecy, and, what are some guidelines to determine when to expect symbolic usage? Aside from the fact that symbolism is a basic characteristic of this kind of literature, the following reasons come to mind.

1. Effective portrayal. Symbol is often the most convenient or forceful way to portray a message. "A picture can replace a thousand words," and frequently does, more accurately and effectively than a prolonged verbal description. Road maps, chemical formulae, artist's sketches, architect's blueprints, portraits, and sculptures are examples of "symbolic usage" that express what words themselves could never adequately portray.

In the case of apocalyptic literature, which depicts the great struggle between good and evil, the use of symbol and imagery should be expected. Issues of cosmic scope could not be set forth effectively by literal expression. Here is a case where human inability to understand the complexities of the moral controversy gives reason for the use of symbols.

2. Portrayal of the future. Future history itself would be a phenomenon difficult to describe literally in any way intelligible to the readers and hearers of the prophecy. Revelation claims, of course, to unveil the future, and the question then arises, How better could the future be portrayed than in symbolic terms?

3. Common pool symbols. Another explanation for the use of symbolism is the fact that certain symbolic expressions were a part of Israel's vocabulary, a pool of common symbolic usage. Thus, for example, the expressions *Egypt* and *Babylon* would be readily understood in their symbolic import in the book of Revelation.

Symbolism's fluidity. By their nature, symbols are *fluid* . They are word pictures. Some elements of this fluidity may be noted:

1. The same symbol may signify different things in different contexts. For example, the *lion* may be used to refer to Christ (Lion of Judah in Rev 5:5), to the devil ("roaring lion" in 1 Pet 5:8), to Judah ("lion's whelp" in Gen 49:9), and to Assyria and Babylon ("lions" in Jer 50:17).

2. Different symbols may represent the same thing. For instance, both *lion* and *lamb* represent Christ in Revelation 5.

3. There may be a variation of symbols depicting the same thing within the very same context. For example, Christ is portrayed as both the *shepherd* and the *door into the sheepfold* in John 10; the seven heads of the beast of Revelation 17 are declared to be both *seven mountains* and *seven kings*.

4. Details may vary in what are apparently the same symbols. For example, the four living creatures in Ezekiel 1 form the background for the throne scene of Revelation 4. In the former passage each creature has four faces, whereas in the latter passage each creature has only one face. But the descriptions of the faces are the same in both instances. Other examples would be the horses of Zechariah 1:8 (compare also 6:2–3) and Revelation 6, and the olive trees in relationship to the lampstands as given in Zechariah 4 and Revelation 11.

The modern western reader is prone to desire mathematical exactness with respect to symbolic usage, but such is contrary to the very nature of symbolism. When the fluid nature of symbol is understood, as illustrated above, variations and variableness should not trouble us. In fact, this fluid nature of symbol should itself be a deterrent to us against over-literalness in interpretation.

It is important, nevertheless, that we stay within the bounds of the conventional usage of symbols. When interpreting any particular symbol in the book of Revelation, for example, we must think in terms of the range of conventional meanings. Then we do our interpretation on the basis of a meaning that harmonizes with the specific context in the Apocalypse.

Symbolism's inner reality. One reason symbols are *fluid* is that they portray an inner reality that functions beyond the significance of the specific item or items that serve as their source. Minear explains this function as follows:

> This is a comprehensive rather than a disjunctive mode of seeing and thinking. It apprehends events in terms of their inner structure as responses to God's action. God's action in each epoch induced a recognizable pattern of reactions, and the prophet sought to discern that pattern for the sake of his readers. Egypt remained a distinctive name but it conveyed a symbolic richness of meaning neither limited by the original context nor scornful of it. Behind this mode of viewing was a distinctive ontological stance, to which we should give more attention than we usually do.[24]

Examples of this dynamic can be easily supplied in the book of Revelation. In fact, it would not be amiss to state that this represents the basic manner in which symbolism functions within the Apocalypse. For example:

1. The symbols of the "two witnesses" (Rev 11) have backgrounds from Zechariah 4 and from Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, and other prophets.

2. In the central portion of the book of Revelation (8:2–18:24) lies a *double* portrayal of what might be called the "Exodus-from-Egypt"/"Fall-of-Babylon" motif. The first five trumpets have as their background source the plagues on ancient Egypt, whereas with the sixth trumpet the scene shifts for background to the River Euphrates, the river of Babylon (9:14). Likewise, the first five plagues are again based on the plagues on Egypt; whereas with the sixth plague the scene again changes to the River Euphrates (16:12).

3. What might be termed a "Fall-of-Babylon"/"Elijah-on-Mt. Carmel" motif occurs in the sixth plague (16:12–16).[25]

Here OT backgrounds privide a reality for the Christian community that surpasses the original meanings. We note two aspects of interest:

1. God's constant care for His people of earlier times continues with the Christian community, for whom Jesus Christ is "the same yesterday and today and for ever" (Heb 13:8). The concept is inherent in the affirmation of our Lord's being the Alpha and Omega (1:8; 22:13). Indeed, the new Christian community, including that segment represented by the Asian congregations that constituted John's parish, was a *continuation* in the line of the people whom God had chosen and sustained in the face of adversity and the wiles of the devil.

2. The Christian church represents a *heightening* of all that God had done for His people in the past. Not only is this community in the line of faith, it represents a culmination of God's purposes and plans for His people. Hence, all the meaningful experiences in the history of God's dealing with His chosen people in the OT can illustrate, at least to a point, the experience that may be expected by Christians. And Christian experience, as just noted, will transcend those original experiences or events upon which the symbolic representations are based.

From the foregoing discussion we see that symbolic backgrounds are often *merged* or *blended*. This blending of symbolism for the imagery of Revelation is, indeed, characteristic of the book. Hence, we emphasize again that in each case the original meanings of the background materials have not been destroyed. Neither is there a denial or minimization of the historical events or situations alluded to in the imagery. Rather, this blending of the symbolic backgrounds depicts a new reality that transcends any individual background, or even the combination of backgrounds, so that *the whole exceeds the sum of the parts*.[26]

Suggestions for interpreting symbolism in Revelation. As a matter of convenience we supply the following list of suggestions for interpreting symbols in Revelation. This list is not comprehensive; moreover, the interpreter should not use it woodenly, but should consider it a suggestive guide for the reader confronted by the vast and puzzling usage of symbolic language in the Apocalypse.[27]

1. Understand the symbol for what it is: a figure or sign that is fluid and representative in nature.

2. Recognize the reasons for using the symbol in the particular passage and context under study.

3. Discover as far as possible the source(s) of the symbolism, noting the original meaning and any derived meanings for the community now using it.

4. Consider the symbol from the standpoint of the kind of literature where it occurs (*apocalyptic* for the book of Revelation, a literature that is characterized by a cosmic eschatological emphasis, striking contrasts, etc.).

5. Note the relationship of the symbol to the main theme being treated. For instance, the message of any one of the seven trumpets must be compatible with the broader theme of the entire seven-trumpets vision.

6. Consider the symbol within its immediate literary context or textual setting. There must be compatibility at this level too.

7. Interpret the symbol in relationship to its conventional usage. Its precise meaning (within the range of its conventional usage) is to be determined by the theme being treated and in harmony with the immediate textual setting—the principles enunciated in numbers 5 and 6 above.

8. When looking for the historical application, take care not to "tailor-make" history to fit preconceived ideas of what the application of the message should be; rather, let the message itself be the guide to the historical fulfillment.

9. Do not seek to find an application for every detail of an extended symbolism; instead, get the main picture or lesson. Parts of symbolic presentations often simply round out the picture.

10. Recognize that the extent of a symbolic presentation may vary from a simple metaphor to an extended allegory and that the meaning of a specific symbol may vary in different contexts.

Purpose and Theme of Revelation

To determine the purpose and theme of a given book of the Bible is one of the basic procedures of sound biblical interpretation. This holds true for the Revelation, as well as for any other Bible writing. As a rule, commentators are careful to note clues indicating the writer's purpose and theme. But insufficient care has too frequently been given in this respect to the book of Revelation. Let us see what the Apocalypse itself tells us.

Revelation's Purpose

The purpose of the book of Revelation is set forth clearly in its preamble: "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants what must soon take place ..." (1:1).

In view of this explicit statement it is remarkable that some commentators claim Revelation has nothing to say about events future to John's time. They suggest that the Apocalypse is simply a beautiful picture of Christ and the ideals that emerge from that picture. A beautiful picture of Christ is indeed presented throughout the Revelation, but to deny the book's stated purpose to disclose future events contradicts its own assertion.

Revelation's Twofold Theme

Revelation's twofold theme elaborates on the purpose of the prophecy. As stated in both the prologue and epilogue, the theme is as follows:

> Behold, he [Christ] is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, ... "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty. (1:7–8)

> Behold, I [Christ] am coming soon, bringing my recompense, to repay every one for what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. (22:12–13)

Return. One main focus of the book of Revelation is the second advent of Christ. Our Lord will come to put an end to the reign of sin and sorrow, pain and suffering, sickness and death. And when He comes, His reward will be with Him—a just reward, to recompense all people according to their deeds.

His return will bring the final eradication of sin and its horrible accompaniment of misery and woe, will destroy the destroyers of the earth (11:18), and will guarantee an eternal inheritance to those who have followed loyally in His footsteps.

Ever present. But Christ is also depicted in the Revelation as being ever present with His faithful followers during all their tribulations in the "here and now." He is the Alpha and Omega, the One who was dead, is now alive, lives forever, and has the keys of death and Hades (see 1:17–18). His victory is our victory too, even in the face of death (cf. Rev 12:11). Or as put so beautifully in the book of Hebrews, Jesus is both the "author and finisher of our faith" (Heb 12:2, KJV).

Literary Structure of Revelation

Bible expositors generally attempt to ascertain not only a given writer's purpose and theme, but also his procedure in developing that theme. Thus, commentators frequently include an outline of the book under study.

Commentaries on Revelation usually include outlines. But when we compare them, we find the majority to be inconsistent with each other and frequently incompatible with the text of Revelation itself. Some outlines that differ from one another are nonetheless mutually compatible, as I have pointed out elsewhere, whereas other outlines (and this is the majority of them) simply will not fit into a coherent pattern.[28]

It is not our purpose to call attention to the variety of outlines available in commentaries today. Rather, we wish to bring into focus a specific outline that *emerges directly from the text of Revelation itself*. Subsequently, we will notice other literary patterns with an important bearing on how the Apocalypse should be interpreted.

A Literary Chiasmus

We must let the book itself give us the clues for its outline. When this procedure is followed, a beautiful broad literary pattern for the entire book indeed emerges from the text. It takes the form of a *chiasmus*, that is, a pattern of *inverse parallelism*. The supporting data for the outline cannot be given in detail here, but a few observations demand mention.[29]

There is a major structural division between chapters 14 and 15. A prologue and four main visions precede that dividing line, and four main visions and an epilogue follow it. The prologue and epilogue parallel each other. There is a similar paralleling (in inverse order) of the visions from the first division of the book with the visions of the last division. See diagram in chapter 2 of this volume.

We see that the visions prior to the break at the end of chapter 14 deal primarily with the Christian Era. The visions after that break are focused on the era of eschatological judgment. The visions of the first part of the book reveal that the church is defective, God's saints are persecuted, and the forces of evil are having a heyday. By contrast, the visions beginning with chapter 15 reveal a "turning of the tables," so that there is glorious victory for God's saints and doom for the erstwhile powers that lorded it over them.

The visions up through chapter 14 may be characterized as the "historical era," and those thereafter as the "eschatological-judgment era." In the former, the cry goes forth from the souls under the altar, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, *how long before thou wilt judge and avenge* our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?" (6:9–10). In the latter we find a counterpart in the acclamation, "he [God] *has judged* the great harlot … *and he has avenged* on her the blood of his servants" (Rev 19:2).

In the scenes of the first major part of Revelation, visions 2, 3, and 4 reveal a succession of events or developments that reach to and include Christ's second advent. Thus the last item in each series takes us to the final eschatological climax. Nevertheless, the events prior to that climax deal specifically with the historical era. Because of this primary emphasis they may be designated properly as "historical-era" visions.

In the second half of the book the visions themselves consistently manifest the perspective of the eschatological judgment. Nevertheless, they include two kinds of material that pertain to the historical era: (1) *explanations*, which necessarily must be from the prophet's own point in time in order to be understood by him and his readers; and (2) *appeals*, which obviously must be applied in the period before human probation closes if they are to be heeded. These are not "cross-overs" in the visions proper, for the eschatological-judgment setting of the visions themselves is invariable, beginning with the seven last plagues and continuing through subsequent events until the glorious climax is reached in the portrayal of the New Jerusalem and new earth.

When we consider this chiastic structure of Revelation, we immediately see that it aligns well with the twofold theme stated in the prologue and epilogue. The first major part of the book (chaps. 1–14) deals with the era in which the Alpha and Omega is the protector and sustainer of His people in spite of trial and persecution that may come their way. The second major part of the book, beginning with chapter 15, deals with eschatological judgments that cluster around and center in the consummation of the age: Christ's second advent.

Determining Revelation's Literary Arrangement

The broad chiastic structure that encompasses the whole book of Revelation is vital in its theological implications. For one thing, it underscores the prophecy's twofold theme noted above. More importantly, the scheme enables the interpreter to recognize the proper placement and emphasis to be given to the book's specific theological themes or motifs. Consequently, we can examine more closely the procedure by which this chiastic structure was ascertained, a procedure that should guide in the discovery of all biblical literary patterns.

Derived from the text. The point of central importance, one that cannot be overemphasized, is that the *text itself* must be the source for, and the guide to determining literary structure. In developing the pattern outlined above, no other consideration was involved, for proper hermeneutic requires that we draw out of the text its pattern. Even the existence of the major chiasm had to be seen in the text of Revelation itself.

Not many scholars had considered the possibility of a chiastic structure in Revelation until my own piece-by-piece discovery of it over a period of years during the decade of the 1950s. Today, various researchers are now alert to it, including C. M. Maxwell, who has utilized my outline with slight adaptations as the basic structure of Revelation in volume 2 of his *God Cares*.[30] In the process of discovery, certain parallelisms in the *text itself* kept confronting me; these *eventually* led to the outline described above.

Parallel sections. Although the reader is referred elsewhere to the supporting data for the outline we have presented,[31] a few observations should be made here.

First, in order to be genuinely parallel counterparts, the visions must give evidence of pronounced similarity in items mentioned, in broad basic contexts or settings. Isolated similarities are not important in this regard. But when there are clusters of similarities, then we take seriously the possibility of chiastic counterparts.

For example, a number of expositors have noticed such clusters between the prologue and epilogue. In each of these short sections we find mention of the book's message as being sent by an angel and pertaining to things that must soon come to pass (1:1; 22:6), reference to John as recipient of the vision (1:9; 22:8), mention of the "churches" (1:4–6; 22:16), and pronouncement of a blessing on those who heed the messages (1:3; 22:7), as well as the statement of the twofold theme noted earlier (1:7–8; 22:12–13).

Most expositors recognize that the description of the New Jerusalem/new earth in the final chapters of Revelation recall (as fulfillment) the promises made to the overcomers in the messages to the seven churches in the initial chapters.

Similarities between the "doublet" visions (what we have called the "Exodus-from-Egypt"/"Fall-of-Babylon" motif) frequently have been noted: such as similar targets for the trumpets and plagues (earth, sea, rivers, and springs, etc.), and motif and verbal parallels between chapters 12–14 and 17–18 (a woman in each; seven-headed, ten-horned animals; pronouncements of the fall of Babylon; etc.). Despite a recognition of such similarities, Revelation scholars have not, generally, discerned how they parallel each other in a chiastic manner.

Less frequently observed by commentators is the chiastic parallel between Revelation 4:1–8:1 and 19:1–21:4. But these two sections also have clusters of similarities. They both have a setting in which God is seated on a throne, surrounded by four living creatures and twenty-four elders. In this setting they both have similar acclamations and anthems of praise to God and the Lamb.

In the latter vision the response comes to the martyrs' cry in the former vision, relating to God's "judging" and "avenging" them. A rider on a white horse is portrayed in both visions. Woe comes to the "kings of earth" and other specified groups. Reference is made to the blessings of God's dwelling with His people and "wiping away all tears from their eyes," etc.

Surely such an abundance of significant similarities between two visions indicates that they are counterparts. When placed in position with other pairs of visions that have similar relationships (*as indicated in the biblical text itself*), the overall chiastic structure of Revelation appears.

Other Chiasms in Revelation

Revelation also contains chiastic literary patterns other than the major one we have discussed. These may embrace multiple chapters, cover one chapter (Rev 18, for example), or occur in even shorter sections. Here we present one of these as an example. It embraces certain items and a particular dynamic in chapters 12–20.

Many expositors believe a basic dividing line in the Apocalypse occurs between chapters 11 and 12. One reason is that chapters 12 and 13 introduce what appears to be a new element: namely, the antidivine trinity of dragon, sea-beast, and earth-beast. Should the book be divided, therefore, at this point rather than between chapters 14 and 15?

It is clear from the biblical text that the visions up through chapter 14 are indeed "historical-era" ones (with three of them climaxing in Christ's second advent), whereas the subsequent visions are placed in a setting after human probation has closed. However, the very portrayal of the antidivine trinity plus "Babylon" and the beast-worshippers reveals a chiasm.

In this series the entities depicted enter the scene during the historical era in the order of:

1. Dragon (chap. 12).
2. Sea-beast and earth-beast or "false prophet" (chap. 13).
3. Babylon (14:8).
4. Beast-worshippers (14:9–11).

They meet their doom during the eschatological-judgment era in the *exact reverse order* of:

4. Beast-worshippers (16:2).
3. Babylon (16:19–18:24).
2. Sea-beast and false prophet (19:20).
5. Dragon (20:1–10).

The significant point to notice here is that the dividing line between the era when they have sovereignty and when they meet their doom comes precisely where the chiastic break occurs for the entire book: at the close of chapter 14.

Patterns Revealing Sequence

In the historical era section of the book of Revelation there is a literary pattern repeated at least three times. It starts with chapter 4 and ends with chapter 14. This fourfold pattern (or series of patterns) may be illustrated as in the chart on page 34.

In the first three visions of the "eschatological-judgment" era (Rev 15–21:4) series, a similar sort of fourfold pattern exists, adapted, of course, to what is appropriate for that particular era. Though it is beyond our scope to outline those visions, we note that the second section in them may be termed "The Judgmental Progression," and the third section provides "Appeals."[32]

In summary, we rightly conclude that Revelation has a remarkable balance in its literary patterns. As a final note, we should observe that the introductory scenes to the eight visions are set in a temple context or embrace temple imagery. It will suffice to point out that this "temple setting" for the "Victorious-Introduction" scenes provides one of the means by which Revelation's strong "vertical continuity" is depicted.

Literary Structure and Interpretation

While other factors besides the literary structure of the Apocalypse impact on its interpretation, a sound procedure of study must not exclude its input. In fact, the basic structure and other patterns we have indicated above provide important guidelines for interpretation.

Recapitulation Sequences in Revelation 4–14

	Seals (4:1–8:1)	Trumpets (8:2–11:18)	Contesting Forces (11:19–14:20)
1. Victorious Vision	Throne Room, & Lamb Worthy to Open the Scroll (4:1–5:14)	Incense Mingled With Prayers of Saints (8:2–5)	Open Temple, With Ark of Testament Visible (11:19)
2. The Historical Progression	First six Seals (6:1–17)	First six Trumpets (8:7–9:21)	Evil Forces Attack God's People (12:1–13:18)
3. Spotlight on Last Events	Sealing of 144,000; Great Multitude (7:1–17)	Angel & Scroll; Temple & Two Witnesses (10:1–11:14)	The Redeemed 144,000; the Three Angels' Messages (14:1–12)
4. Glorious Climax	Seventh Seal (8:1)	Seventh Trumpet (11:15–18)	Harvest of Earth (14:14–20)

First, the literary structure indicates that any interpretation that makes the messages of the Revelation either *entirely historical* or *entirely eschatological* is incorrect, for the book is divided into major parts that are historical and eschatological, respectively.

Second, *no absolutely straight-line method* of interpretation setting forth a completely sequential chain of events or developments is valid, whether this be from the preterist, continuous historical (historicist), or futurist point of view. For if the book is indeed to be divided at the end of chapter 14 into historical and eschatological divisions, this literary chiastic arrangement renders suspect any interpretation that bridges the dividing line with a continuing "lock-step" sequence of events. This is true whether that sequence is looked upon as meeting fulfillment in the ancient world, in a continuous stream of events down through the Christian Era, or in a yet future series of events.

Third, the evidences for recapitulation in Revelation (compare the paralleling literary structures noted above) make it reasonable to assume that within each main part of the Apocalypse the same general ground is covered in *repeated* sequences (at least in some recapitulationary or overlapping manner). Thus, the *same historical era or setting* is viewed from different perspectives or in differing aspects in the four visions that form the first division of the book.

Fourth, we must interpret a given section of materials according to their location in the book's major chiastic structure. For example, the so-called "amillennial" position that equates the thousand-year period in Revelation 20 with the Christian Era is negated by the fact that John places it squarely within the "eschatological-judgment" series of visions.

Finally, it must not be overlooked that the division of the book into two major parts with paralleling subsections can guide us toward a proper interpretation of specific passages. Thus, whenever a passage in one division of Revelation is understood, it can provide clues toward the meaning of the correlative passage in the other division of the book.

Chapter II

The Eight Basic Visions*

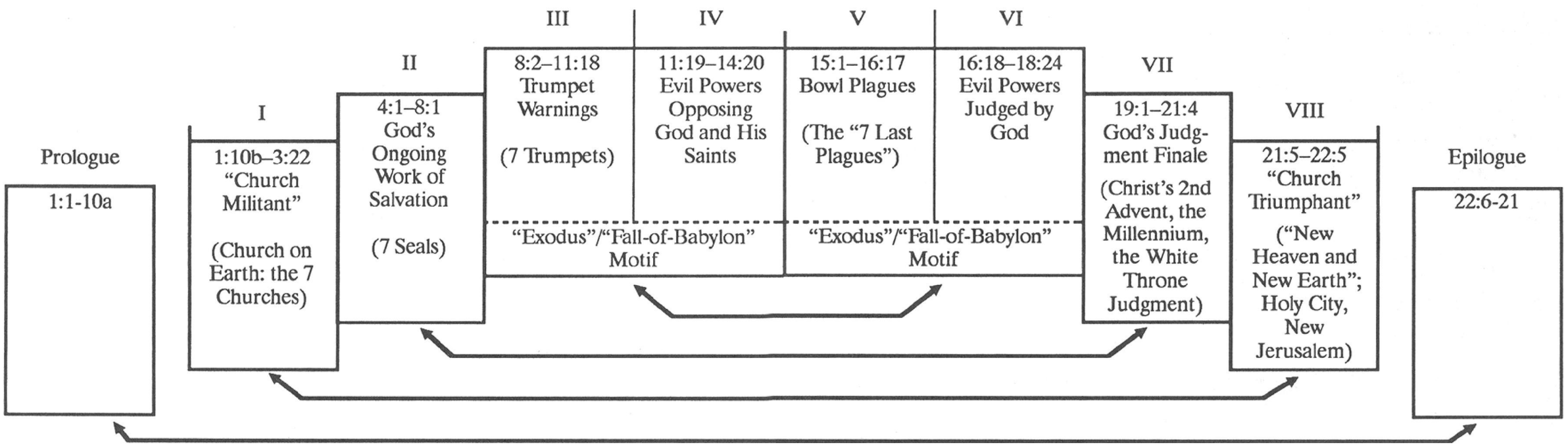
Kenneth A. Strand

The book of Revelation is a remarkably well-constructed literary piece, containing a multiplicity of neatly intertwining patterns. Such patterns are more than simply demonstrations of aesthetic taste and compositional skill, and they also transcend the useful purpose of serving as mnemonic devices. Indeed, in a forthright and forceful way they highlight various aspects of the book's theological message.

In broadest scope, the entire Apocalypse is structured into an overall chiastic pattern in which prologue and epilogue are counterparts and in which the intervening major prophetic sequences or visions are also paired in a chiastic or inverse order. This broad chiastic structure and its significance I have treated on several previous occasions,[1] and they need no further elaboration for our purposes here, except to notice two specific features: (1) Aside from the prologue and epilogue, there are *eight* major prophetic sequences—four that precede and four that follow a line drawn between chapters 14 and 15. (2) The visions preceding the chiastic dividing line have basically a historical perspective (that is, they relate to the Christian Era), and the visions after the chiastic dividing line depict the eschatological-judgment era.

With respect to the first item above, it should be emphasized that there are indeed *eight* major prophetic sequences in the Apocalypse, not seven, as various interpreters have assumed.[2] Concerning the second item, several qualifications should be noted: In the second through fourth visions, each historical sequence concludes with a section that portrays the time of eschatological judgment; and in the subsequent visions, which in their essence furnish an enlargement on that eschatological-judgment era, there are two kinds of material that pertain to the historical era—explanations (which must obviously be made in terms of the prophet's own perspective in history); and exhortations or appeals (which have value only prior to the eschatological judgment and which would, of course, be meaningless at the time of the final eschatological judgment itself). These qualifications concerning "exceptions" to the main thrust or coverage of the visions on each side of the chiastic dividing line should not, however, be considered as "crossover" materials. These data are important parts of their own sequences, are in proper position as they stand, and speak significantly to the contexts in which they are found. Moreover, they are discrete and meaningful units as to nature, placement, and/or purpose, within their own specific visions.

Diagram 1. The Chiastic Structure of the Book of Revelation



For convenience, the comprehensive chiastic structure of Revelation into prologue, epilogue, and eight visions is set forth in outline form in diagram 1, which includes also my suggestions as to the textual boundaries and general topics of the various visions. In this diagram and throughout the remainder of the discussion in this article, the term "visions" will refer to these eight complete prophetic sequences, not to individual visionary experiences of lesser extent. Also, Roman numerals will be used to identify the visions in sequence.

The present study has two main purposes, and the data pertaining to each of these will be presented in separate articles: First, the present essay analyzes briefly some parallel patterns in the eight major visions of the book of Revelation. Then a follow-up article[3] will focus a bit more intensively on the particular blocs of text that introduce these eight visions and which can be designated as "victorious-introduction scenes," inasmuch as they provide for each vision a setting which portrays in dramatic fashion God's present care for His people and gives assurance of ultimate victory for Christ's saints or "loyal ones." For purposes of identification in the present article, Roman numerals (I, II, etc.) will continue to be used, as in diagram 1, for designating the eight visions. Each vision, however, has either two or four main sections or blocs of text, and capital letters (A, B, etc.) will serve as identifiers for these.

1. An Analysis of Patterns Within the Eight Visions

The first and the final visions (I and VIII) of the Apocalypse are composed of a "Victorious-Introduction Scene" (A), plus one further main bloc of text (B) that may be called the "Basic Prophetic Description." The other six visions (II–VII) have these same two blocs, but with the addition of two further blocs (C and D).

Diagram 2. Paralleling Structures in Revelation's Eight Major Visions

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	
A	Victorious-Introduction Scene	Victorious-Introduction Scene	Victorious-Introduction Scene	Victorious-Introduction Scene	Victorious-Introduction Scene	Victorious-Introduction Scene	Victorious-Introduction Scene	Victorious-Introduction Scene	A
B	Basic Prophetic Description	Basic Prophetic Description	Basic Prophetic Description	Basic Prophetic Description	Basic Prophetic Description	Basic Prophetic Description	Basic Prophetic Description	Basic Prophetic Description	B
C		Interlude	Interlude	Interlude	Interlude	Interlude	Interlude		C
D		Eschatological Culmination	Eschatological Culmination	Eschatological Culmination	Eschatological Culmination	Eschatological Culmination	Eschatological Culmination		D

In this essay, the third blocs of text in the second through seventh visions are throughout given the basic caption of "Interlude"—a term quite regularly applied by the exegetes for these particular sections in visions II, III, and IV, but equally applicable to the corresponding (but much shorter) sections in visions V, VI, and VII. It should be noted, however, that although the term "interlude" frequently suggests an interruption to, or hiatus within, the flow of thought, what these third blocs of material do in visions II–VII of the Apocalypse is to enhance or intensify the thrust of the immediately preceding material.[4] The fourth bloc can be designated as the "Eschatological Culmination"; and in a certain sense, both it and the preceding "Interlude" are actually an extension of the "Basic Prophetic Description" begun in the second bloc.

Although it will be necessary later in this article to add certain further refinements to the foregoing basic analysis, at this point we may summarize in diagram form the results reached thus far. Such a summary is provided in diagram 2.

2. Summary of Contents of the Visions

At this juncture it is useful to take an overview of the content of each of the eight visions. The summaries given here follow the broad lines of structure indicated above. It should be emphasized that these are indeed *summaries*, and the reader can fill in details by consulting the texts indicated for each of the visions.

The Historical Visions

Vision I, 1:10b–3:22

Bloc A, Victorious-Introduction Scene, 1:10b–20. Christ appears to John on Patmos as the ever-living and all-powerful One, who walks among the seven golden candlesticks that represent the seven churches.

Bloc B, Basic Prophetic Description, chapters 2 and 3. Christ gives messages of praise, rebuke, warning, and exhortation to the individual churches as their varying conditions require.

Vision II, 4:1–8:1

Bloc A, Victorious-Introduction Scene, chapters 4 and 5. John sees a throne set in heaven, with a sea of glass and seven lamps of fire before the throne, and with four living creatures and twenty-four elders surrounding the throne. In a dramatic and suspenseful scene the declaration is made that the slain Lamb alone is able to take from the hand of the One seated on the throne a seven-sealed scroll and to break the seals and open the scroll. The Lamb then takes the scroll, and anthems of praise ascend from the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders, and the entire universe.

Bloc B, Basic Prophetic Description, chapter 6. The first six seals of the scroll are broken, with the result that four horsemen go forth, souls under the altar utter a cry of "How long" until there is judgment and vindication for them, and signs are given on earth and in heaven of impending judgment.

Bloc C, Interlude, chapter 7. The sequence is "interrupted" to focus on the sealing of 144,000 during the end-time.

Bloc D, Eschatological Culmination, 8:1. The seventh seal is opened, at which there is "silence in heaven" for the duration of half an hour.

Vision III, 8:2–11:18

Bloc A, Victorious-Introduction Scene, 8:2–6. Seven angels with trumpets appear, and another angel goes to the golden altar and there offers incense whose smoke, mingled with the prayers of the saints, ascends to God. Next, the angel fills a censer with live coals from the altar and throws this upon the earth, resulting in the judgment symbols of voices, thunder, lightning, and earthquake.

Bloc B, Basic Prophetic Description, 8:7–9:21. The first six trumpets are blown, releasing forces of devastation that embrace the symbolisms of a storm of hail upon the earth, a great burning mountain thrown into the sea, etc. The first five of these trumpets draw imagery from the plagues on ancient Egypt, but the sixth trumpet shifts the background to Babylon by mention of the "great river Euphrates" in 9:14.[5]

Bloc C, Interlude, 10:1–11:13. An angel holding an open scroll announces (10:6) that "there should be time no longer" (KJV); or, as alternatively translated, "there should be no more delay" (RSV).[6] John is commanded to eat the scroll and does so, finding it sweet in his mouth but bitter in his stomach; the prophet is then instructed to measure the temple, altar, and people (a direct allusion, as I have shown elsewhere, to the year-end Day of Atonement ritual in the ancient Jewish cultus;[7] and the testimony and career of the two witnesses are described.

Bloc D, Eschatological Culmination, 11:14–18. The seventh trumpet is blown, resulting in the announcement that "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ";[8] then an anthem of praise arises, emphasizing, among other things, that the time has come for judgment of the dead, for rewarding the saints, and for destroying the "destroyers of the earth."

Vision IV, 11:19–14:20

Bloc A, Victorious-Introduction Scene, 11:19. "God's temple in heaven was opened," making visible "the ark of his covenant"; then "flashes of lightning, voices, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail" occur.

Bloc B, Basic Prophetic Description, chapters 12 and 13. The dragon, leopardlike sea beast, and two-horned earth beast persecute God's people.

Bloc C, Interlude, 14:1–13. John sees (1) the Lamb and the 144,000 victorious saints standing on Mt. Zion, and (2) three angels flying in heaven and proclaiming warning messages.

Bloc D, Eschatological Culmination, 14:14–20. Earth's twofold harvest is reaped—(1) the harvest of grain, and (2) the grapes that are thrown into the great winepress of God's wrath.

The Eschatological-Judgment Visions

Vision V, 15:1–16:17

Bloc A, Victorious-Introduction Scene, 15:1–16:1. The victorious saints stand on the sea of glass and sing the Song of Moses and the Lamb; and when the "temple of the tent of witness in heaven" is opened, seven angels come forth and receive seven bowls "full of the wrath of God," smoke fills the temple so that no one can enter till the plagues of the seven angels have been completed, and finally instruction is given to the angels to go their ways and pour out the bowls.

Bloc B, Basic Prophetic Description, 16:2–14. The first six bowls of wrath are poured out, with devastating effects on earth, sea, rivers and fountains, etc. (Again, as in the trumpets septet, imagery for the first five bowls is patterned after the plagues on ancient Egypt, with the scene shifting to Babylon as the sixth bowl refers to the "great river Euphrates" in 16:12.)

Bloc C, Interlude, 16:15. Into the description of the sixth bowl—the drying up of the Euphrates and the presence of demonic spirits that deceive the kings of the earth and lead them to the "battle on the great day of God the Almighty" (16:12–14)—is inserted a striking macarism in verse 15: "Lo, I [Christ] am coming like a thief. Blessed is he who is awake...." Then follows an added comment to the effect that the place of the battle is called "Armageddon" (vs. 16).

Since we have now moved into the section of the Apocalypse that provides visions of the eschatological judgment, rather than pertaining to the historical era, it is obvious that a new sort of "interlude" can be expected, as is indeed the case here. The earlier interludes were somewhat detailed *descriptions* of events or conditions during a final portion of the historical era. The interludes that occur in visions V–VII are rather of a crisp, hortatory nature.

The question may be asked, Why such interludes here? For this particular one in Revelation 16:15, Paul S. Minear has aptly pointed out, "The saying reveals the terrible danger in which the unsuspecting Christian stands. If one asks with R. H. Charles, 'How could anyone sleep through the cosmic earthquakes which were happening?' one may answer, 'That is just the point.' There were Christians asleep, so John believed, quite undisturbed by din or doom, unaware that anything was happening that could threaten their treasure or leave them exposed and naked. To be asleep was to be unconscious of the urgent necessity of the time. (Compare the disciples in Gethsemane—Mark 14:26–42.) The beatitude was designated for sentinels who had forgotten that a war was being fought."[9]

Bloc D, Eschatological Culmination, 16:17. The seventh bowl of wrath is poured out, and there issues from the throne in the temple in heaven the declaration, "It is done!"

Vision VI, 16:18–18:24

Bloc A, Victorious-Introduction Scene, 16:18–17:3a. The traditional signs of judgment occur (voices, thunder, lightning, earthquake, and hail), and "great Babylon" comes into "judgmental remembrance" before God. John is then taken into the wilderness to see this judgment upon Babylon.

Bloc B, Basic Prophetic Description, 17:3b–18:3. A description of Babylon as a harlot and also of the seven-headed and ten-horned scarlet-colored beast upon which she rides is introduced in the early verses of chapter 17 (vss. 3b–8). This descriptive scene is followed by considerable explanatory detail (vss. 9–18) that culminates in a reference to the devastation of the harlot by the beast's ten horns (vss. 16–17) and the identification of this harlot as the great city that rules over earth's kings (vs. 18). In the first three verses of chapter 18, a recital of various aspects of Babylon's corruption sets the stage for the interlude appeal and the description of destruction that follow.

Bloc C, Interlude, 18:4–8, 20. Before the actual portrayal of Babylon's devastation through fire, an appeal is made for God's people to "come out" of Babylon, so that they do not become participants in her sins and recipients of her plagues. In this connection there is also a reiteration, in elaborated form, of God's decree of judgment against Babylon.

Inasmuch as in the chiastic structure of the material in chapter 18, verse 20 is a chiastic counterpart of verses 4–8,[10] both of these "interludes" within this particular chiasm should probably be considered as the total "interlude" for the larger sequence from 17:3b–18:24. Verse 20 gives a call for rejoicing over the fact that God has proclaimed against Babylon herself the judgment which she had imposed upon God's people.[11]

Bloc D, Eschatological Culmination, 18:9–19, 21–24. The central section of chapter 18 (vss. 9–19) portrays, through a threefold dirge, Babylon's utter desolation by fire; and the final section of the chapter (vss. 21–24) emphasizes Babylon's doom and her utterly desolate condition after God's judgment upon her.

Vision VII, 19:1–21:4

Bloc A, Victorious-Introduction Scene, 19:1–10. In a heavenly setting that parallels the setting given in chapter 4, anthems arise in praise of God for His having judged the great harlot Babylon and vindicated God's people; then reference is made to the Lamb's bride being ready for the wedding, and a blessing is pronounced upon those who are "invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." (It should be noted that though the heavenly temple setting of chapters 4–5 and chapter 19 is the same, there is difference with respect to activity and perspective—a fact also made clear by the content of the anthems in the two visions. The former vision pertains clearly to the historical era, and this one pertains just as clearly to the era of eschatological judgment.

Bloc B, Basic Prophetic Description, 19:11–20:5. Christ's second advent is dramatically portrayed, and consequences of it are given. Among the negative results enumerated are the birds' feast consisting of the enemies of God (19:17–18), the lake-of-fire fate for the beast and false prophet (19:19–20), and the imprisonment of Satan in the "bottomless pit" or "abyss" for a thousand years (20:1–3). On the positive side is the first resurrection, in which the martyred saints arise. They then live and reign with Christ for a thousand years (20:4–5).

Bloc C, Interlude, 20:6. "Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power...."

Bloc D, Eschatological Culmination, 20:7–21:4. The culminating events at the end of the thousand years are set forth. On the negative side are the loosing of Satan, the resurgence of his deceptive work, the vain effort of his evil confederacy to capture "the camp of the saints," and the final fiery destruction of this confederacy. On the positive side is John's vision of "a new heaven and a new earth," with the holy city New Jerusalem descending from heaven to earth, and God Himself tabernacling with His people.

Vision VIII, 21:5–22:5

Bloc A, Victorious-Introduction Scene, 21:5–11a. The proclamation is made that Christ's victorious ones will inherit all things, and John sees the holy city New Jerusalem descend from heaven to earth. (As a backdrop, the final section of the preceding vision has already portrayed the condition on earth after the descent of the New Jerusalem [21:1–4].)

Bloc B, Basic Prophetic Description, 21:11b–22:5. The holy city New Jerusalem is described in detail.

3. Further Analysis of Text-Blocs A, B, C, and D

With the foregoing background, we may now proceed to some further generalizations concerning the nature of the respective sections (A, B, etc.) within the eight visions. Also, we can suggest additional notations for the captions to these blocs of text, beyond what has already been indicated in the earlier sections of this article and in diagram 2.

As we consider the "Victorious-Introduction Scene" for each of the eight visions, we find that there is always a basic temple setting and/or temple-imagery background of some sort.[12] Therefore, our caption of "Victorious-Introduction Scene" (bloc A) can now be supplemented with the phrase, "With Temple Setting."

As for the second through fourth blocs of text (blocs B, C, and D), a difference in perspective should be noted between the visions preceding the chiastic dividing line (visions I–IV) and the visions following it (visions V–VIII). With respect to the former, the "Basic Prophetic Description" is within the historical arena; with respect to the latter, the basic vision material in the B blocs pertains to the eschatological or final judgment. For visions I–IV, therefore, the "Basic Prophetic Description" needs the added qualification "in History"; and for visions V–VIII that qualification would be "in Final Judgment."

As for the third blocs of text (C), in visions II–IV the basic designation of "Interlude" may likewise be supplemented with an additional phrase—"Spotlight on Last Events" (meaning prior to Christ's second advent), inasmuch as the "Interlude" in each instance enlarges on the period of time just before the eschatological culmination. For visions V–VII the added phrase "Exhortation or Appeal" is appropriate, for the terrors of the final-judgment scenes are "interrupted" in order to give short blocs of text setting forth encouragement to faithfulness and/or appeals for repentance. (In two of these instances of exhortation or appeal, the interlude is cast, as we have already seen, basically in the form of a macarism—16:15 and 20:4.)

The sections on "Eschatological Culmination" (the D blocs) all pertain to the final eschatological consummation, as noted earlier; but those concluding sections for visions II–IV provide a climactic conclusion to series that relate to the historical era, whereas those for visions V–VII deal specifically with the final or terminating portion of eschatological-judgment series already in progress in the earlier sections of those visions. Blocs D for visions II–IV may therefore be designated as "Eschatological Culmination: Climax to History"; and the D blocs for visions V–VII may be termed "Eschatological Culmination: The Judgment Finale." Diagram (on the next page) incorporates the above-mentioned refinements to the data given in diagram 2, and also includes my suggestions as to the textual boundaries for the blocs of material as set forth in the second section of the present article.

4. Conclusion

In this article, we have observed that there is a very consistent and balanced literary structure in the book of Revelation. This structure not only has aesthetic and mnemonic values or qualities, but also speaks significantly to the theological message of the book. Various aspects of the theology will be dealt with in a follow-up article that will explore in further detail the "victorious-introduction scenes" to the eight visions, but one significant theological focus may be mentioned here: The broad chiastic structure itself emphasizes a twofold theme that embraces and undergirds the various messages of the book—(1) that Christ is Alpha and Omega, and (2) that He will return at the end of the age to reward all persons according to their works (Rev 1:7–8 and 22:12–13). In other words, He is a consistent, trustworthy, and ever-present help and support to His faithful ones during this historical era of adversity for them (cf. Rev 1:17–18; Matt 28:20b; John 16:33; Heb 12:2a; 13:8); and He will personally return to usher in the series of events that destroy the "destroyers of the earth" and that provide to His loyal followers the inheritance of the "new earth" and the fulfillment of all the good promises made to them (see Rev 11:15–18; 21:1–4, 7, 22–27; 22:1–5).[13] The four prophetic sequences preceding the chiastic dividing line deal primarily with the first aspect, and the four major visions subsequent to that dividing line are devoted mainly to the second aspect.

Diagram 3. Overview of Structure and Content of the Apocalypse

	Historical-Era Visions				Eschatological-Judgment-Era Visions			
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
A	Victorious-Introduction Scene With Temple Setting (1:10b–20)	Victorious-Introduction Scene With Temple Setting (chaps. 4 & 5)	Victorious-Introduction Scene With Temple Setting (8:2–6)	Victorious-Introduction Scene With Temple Setting (11:19)	Victorious-Introduction Scene With Temple Setting (15:1–16:1)	Victorious-Introduction Scene With Temple Setting (16:18–17:3a)	Victorious-Introduction Scene With Temple Setting (19:1–10)	Victorious-Introduction Scene With Temple Setting (21:5–11a)
B	Basic Prophetic Description in History (chaps. 2 & 3)	Basic Prophetic Description in History (chap. 6)	Basic Prophetic Description in History (8:7–9:21)	Basic Prophetic Description in History (chaps. 12, 13)	Basic Prophetic Description in Final Judgment (16:2–14, 16)	Basic Prophetic Description in Final Judgment (17:3b–18:3)	Basic Prophetic Description in Final Judgment (19:11–20:5)	Basic Prophetic Description in Final Judgment (21:11b–22:5)
C		Interlude: Spotlight on Last Events (chap. 7)	Interlude: Spotlight on Last Events (10:1–11:13)	Interlude: Spotlight on Last Events (14:1–13)	Interlude: Exhortation or Appeal (16:15)	Interlude: Exhortation or Appeal (18:4–8, 20)	Interlude: Exhortation or Appeal (20:6)	
D		Eschatological Culmination: Climax to History (8:1)	Eschatological Culmination: Climax to History (11:14–18)	Eschatological Culmination: Climax to History (14:14–20)	Eschatological Culmination: Judgmental Finale (16:17)	Eschatological Culmination: Judgmental Finale (18:9–19, 21–24)	Eschatological Culmination: Judgmental Finale (20:7–21:4)	

In closing, one further item may also be briefly introduced here: It is noteworthy that in the introductory scenes of the eight visions, the temple imagery reveals a pattern of first an earthly venue in vision I (candlesticks that represent churches on earth), followed by a heavenly venue in visions II–VII (either [a] an explicit mention of the "temple in heaven" or its furniture and/or [b] a background that indicates this heavenly setting),[14] and followed finally by a return again to an earthly venue in vision VIII (God tabernacling in the "new earth"/"New Jerusalem" [cf. 21:3, 22]). This is a striking phenomenon, whose theological significance and whose correlation with emphasis in general NT theology will be set forth in the subsequent article in this series.

Chapter III

"Victorious-Introduction" Scenes*

Kenneth A. Strand

This chapter is a follow-up to my earlier essay on the basic literary structure of the eight major visions of the book of Revelation.[1] For the sake of convenient reference, diagram 3 of my previous article is here reproduced (on the following pages) as diagram 1 for the present article.

The blocs of text upon which our attention focuses in this study are those designated "A" in this diagram; namely, those carrying the caption "Victorious-Introduction Scene With Temple Setting." We first take an overview of the content of these scenes for visions I through VIII, and then consider some of the specific phenomena and theological implications.

1. Summary of the "Victorious-Introduction Scenes"

In providing the following overview of the content of the eight victorious-introduction scenes, I furnish here both a summary of the textual material itself and a few preliminary comments concerning this material. It should be noted in these summaries that not all details of the scenes are included;[2] however, preceding the summaries themselves, the appropriate Scripture references are presented (as also set forth in diagram 1), and the reader can go to the biblical text itself for a more complete picture.

Diagram 1. Overview of Structure and Content of the Apocalypse

	Historical-Era Visions				Eschatological-Judgment-Era Visions			
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
A	Victorious-Introduction Scene With Temple Setting (1:10b–20)	Victorious-Introduction Scene With Temple Setting (chaps. 4 & 5)	Victorious-Introduction Scene With Temple Setting (8:2–6)	Victorious-Introduction Scene With Temple Setting (11:19)	Victorious-Introduction Scene With Temple Setting (15:1–16:1	Victorious-Introduction Scene With Temple Setting (16:18–17:3a)	Victorious-Introduction Scene With Temple Setting (19:1–10)	Victorious-Introduction Scene With Temple Setting (21:5–11a)
B	Basic Prophetic Description in History (chaps. 2 & 3)	Basic Prophetic Description in History (chap. 6)	Basic Prophetic Description in History (8:7–9:21)	Basic Prophetic Description in History (chaps. 12, 13)	Basic Prophetic Description in Final Judgment (16:2–14, 16)	Basic Prophetic Description in Final Judgment (17:3b–18:3)	Basic Prophetic Description in Final Judgment (19:11–20:5)	Basic Prophetic Description in Final Judgment (21:11b–22:5)
C		Interlude: Spotlight on Last Events (Chap. 7)	Interlude: Spotlight on Last Events (10:1–11:13)	Interlude: Spotlight on Last Events (14:1–13)	Interlude Exhortation or Appeal (16:15)	Interlude Exhortation or Appeal (18:4–8, 20)	Interlude Exhortation or Appeal (20:6)	
D		Eschatological Culmination: Climax to History (8:1)	Eschatological Culmination: Climax to History (11:14–18)	Eschatological Culmination: Climax to History (14:14–20)	Eschatological Culmination Judgmental Finale (16:17)	Eschatological Culmination Judgmental Finale (18:9–19, 21–24)	Eschatological Culmination Judgmental Finale (20:7–21:4)	

Introduction to Vision I

Text: Revelation 1:10b–20

Summary: On the island of Patmos (1:9), the resurrected, heavenly Christ appears in glorious vision to John, revealing Himself as the one who was dead, now lives, is alive forever, and has the keys of *hades* and death. John sees Christ holding seven stars in his right hand and walking among seven golden lampstands. The seven stars are defined as "the angels of the seven churches" (vs. 20), and the seven lampstands are defined as "the seven churches" (1:11)—namely, Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea (vs. 11)

Comment: The fact that the lampstands are temple imagery is generally recognized by the exegetes, though there has been difference of opinion as to the precise background. The question usually raised is whether that background is the *one* lampstand in the "holy place" (outer or first apartment) of the ancient wilderness tabernacle (Exod 26:35; in Herod's temple there was also one lampstand) or the *ten* lampstands in the first apartment of Solomon's Temple (1 Kgs 7:49). A third alternative, generally missed by the commentators, is the lampstand symbolism of Zechariah 4, which plays a very obvious role as background for a later vision in the Apocalypse—Revelation 11, "the temple and two witnesses."[3] Or there may be intentional multiple backgrounds.[4] The main point for us here, in any case, is that the setting of this vision and its temple imagery is *on earth*, not in heaven. This fact is clear from two main considerations: that the heavenly Christ meets John on earth (at Patmos), and that the "lampstands" among which Christ manifests His presence are churches on earth. The fact that the next vision indicates a transition to heaven, as we shall see in our attention to that vision, may be considered a third evidence pointing in the direction of the earthly venue of this first introductory scene.

A further noteworthy point is that this victorious-introduction scene functions to provide comfort and assurance to Christ's faithful followers: His presence is among them as they face the mighty forces of deception and persecution.[5] A *positive* aspect of this sort is indeed characteristic of all eight of the introductory scenes for the major visions of the Apocalypse.

Introduction to Vision II

Text: 4:1–5:14

Summary: John sees an open door "in heaven" and hears a voice beckoning him to "come up hither." He then is immediately "in the Spirit" and sees "a throne" "in heaven," with one seated upon the throne (namely, God, as the context itself and also further visions of Revelation make clear [cf. 4:9–11; 7:10; 19:1–5]). Surrounding the throne were twenty-four elders seated on thrones; before the throne were "seven lamps of fire" and a crystal-like "sea of glass"; and "in the midst of" and "around" the throne were four living creatures. After an anthem of praise to God for His creatorship, the scene turns to a seven-sealed scroll in His hand—a scroll which "no one" in heaven, on earth, or under the earth was able to open. However, in the progression of the drama, one Being was found worthy to open that scroll—namely, the Lamb "as though it had been slain." As the Lamb took the scroll from the right hand of the One sitting on the throne, a series of anthems of praise ensued.

Comment: The first striking feature that confronts us in this scene is the double reference to a new venue—heaven, as contrasted to the earthly setting of the introductory scene to vision I. This heavenly setting is, in fact, emphasized by the double reference to "heaven"—the open door "in heaven" and the throne "in heaven." The "seven lamps of fire" would locate the setting more specifically as the "holy place" or outer apartment of the temple in heaven (the term "temple in heaven" is used specifically in 11:19 and certain other texts).[6] If the "sea of glass" is imagery based on the "laver" of the wilderness tabernacle (Exod 30:18; 38:8) or the "molten sea" and/or ten lavers of the Solomonic Temple (1 Kgs 7:23–39), as various commentators suggest, we appear to have "outer-court" imagery rather than "first-apartment" imagery. This in itself would not pose a problem with respect to the sea's being designated as "before the throne," for all facets of the temple construct could be considered from that perspective. More likely, however, the symbolic background for this "sea of glass" is the "firmament" over the heads of the living creatures and under God's throne in Ezekiel 1:22–28 and 10:1.[7]

This heavenly scene in Revelation 4–5 obviously has a positive thrust. The twin themes of creation (4:11) and redemption (chap. 5) give hope and assurance to Christ's followers, especially as they recognize that the Lamb is adjudged worthy to break the seals and open the scroll—a scroll which has appropriately been called a "scroll of destiny."[8]

Introduction to Vision III

Text: 8:2–6

Summary: Seven angels with seven trumpets are seen by John; but before they proceed from the temple (in heaven) to sound their trumpets, another angel appears with a censer before the golden altar of incense. Mingled with the prayers of saints is incense ascending before God on the throne. Then the censer is thrown onto the earth, followed by typical symbols of divine presence and judgment: "peals of thunder, voices, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake."[9]

Comment: The setting in this vision is once again that of the temple in heaven, and is still also within the outer apartment or "holy place." But the activity has now moved closer toward the inner shrine, for the golden altar of incense is where the action occurs.[10] This scene, like the ones for visions I and II, contains the typical element of assurance—in this case, the portrayal of the saints' prayers mingled with incense ascending before God. However, now in addition to this *positive* aspect, there is for the first time also a *negative* one: The use of the judgmental symbols of voices, thunderings, lightnings, and earthquake, as the censer with burning coals is thrown onto the earth.

Introduction to Vision IV

Text: 11:19

Summary: John sees "God's temple in heaven" opened, with the ark of God's testament or covenant in view. Then there are "flashes of lightning, voices, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail."

Comment: This victorious introduction scene takes us to a new setting within the "temple in heaven": namely, into the inner shrine or "Most Holy Place."[11] There John's focus is on the ark of God's testament or covenant. On the basis of analogy from the tabernacle on earth, the two most significant aspects relating to this ark would be the ten-commandment law and the mercy seat (cf. Exod 40:20). It is therefore interesting to note that in the following "prophetic description" the significant struggle that the "remnant" has with the dragon is over what is represented by these two features of the ark: the "commandments of God" and the "testimony of Jesus" (Rev 12:17).

Introduction to Vision V

Text: 15:1–16:1

Summary: John sees seven angels having the seven last plagues of "the wrath of God." In a first section of this scene he observes on a "sea of glass mingled with fire" those who had gained the victory over the beast, over his image, and over the number of his name. This group sing "the song of Moses … and the song of the Lamb." In the second section of this scene, John observes "the temple of the tent of witness in heaven" opened, and seven angels with the bowls of wrath exiting therefrom. The temple became "filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power," so that "no one could enter the temple" till the seven plagues were over. Then a voice from the temple commanded the seven angels to go and pour out on earth the bowls of the wrath of God.

Comment: Once again the setting for the vision is that of heaven—or more specifically, the temple in heaven. From that temple the seven angels with the bowls of wrath emerge. It is in conjunction with that temple that a "sea of glass" had earlier been seen (Rev 4). And it is that temple which is now filled with smoke. There is a positive emphasis in the fact that the saints on the glassy sea sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb, just as ancient Israel had sung the song of Moses after deliverance from ancient Egyptian bondage (Exod 14 and 15). And there is a twofold negative aspect in the scene: first, in that the angels carry forth bowls of wrath from the temple in order to throw them upon the earth; and second, in that the temple is filled with smoke during the time of the plagues, so that "no one could enter the temple"—a suggestion, undoubtedly, that no ministration of mercy would proceed from the temple at that time.[12]

Introduction to Vision VI

Text: 16:18–17:3a (with 16:17 as background)

Summary: After the seventh angel has poured his bowl of wrath into the air, a loud voice "out of the temple, from the throne," declares, "It is done" (16:17). (This can be considered as a sort of transitional or "swing" element which concludes the seventh plague and introduces this new victorious-introduction scene.)[13] Then immediately the signs of divine judgment follow: "And there were flashes of lightning, voices, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as had never been since men were on the earth, so great was that earthquake." The city of Babylon is split apart, the cities of the nations collapse, and great hail falls from heaven, with every hailstone as "heavy as a hundredweight" (or "about the weight of a talent" [KJV]). Thereafter one of the seven angels having the seven bowls of wrath talked with John, taking him to see the judgment of the great harlot (Babylon, as the ensuing prophetic description makes clear).

Comment: At first sight, it would appear that solely a *negative* aspect is emphasized in this victorious-introduction scene, for it utilizes immediately the judgmental symbolisms—in this instance heightened again, with an emphasis on the exceedingly fierce nature of both the earthquake and the hail. Although there is only negative judgment in the devastation to come upon Babylon because of the "cup of the fury of his [God's] wrath" (16:19; see also 17:1–2), nevertheless, there is implicitly a positive assurance for God's saints in this scene—in that Babylon's nefarious activity has now been terminated, with her herself undergoing the divine judgment for her misdeeds. (Cf. 18:20 for a call to "rejoice.")

Introduction to Vision VII

Text: 19:1–10

Summary: In the setting of the throne, the twenty-four elders, and the four living creatures (cf. chap. 4), John hears the voice of "a great multitude in heaven" praising God for having judged the great harlot and having avenged the blood of His servants upon her. Further anthems of praise are sung, and announcement is made that the marriage of the Lamb has come and that "his Bride has made herself ready." A blessing is pronounced upon those invited to "the marriage supper of the Lamb."

Comment: The scene here is one that is obviously parallel to that of Revelation 4–5—with the throne, four living creatures, twenty-four elders, and anthems of praise being basic to both.[14] However, whereas in Revelation 4–5, there is a "scroll of destiny" still to be opened, and whereas also during the actual breaking of the seals of that scroll in chapter 6 there was a cry of "How long" until the vindication for God's martyrs would come (see 6:9–11), there is in chapter 19 a striking reversal: there is here praise and acclamation to God for His having now brought about that vindication.

In the introduction of vision VII, there is, moreover, an emphasis on the "marriage supper of the Lamb" (vs. 9) and reverence to the Lamb's "Bride" (vs. 7). The white clothing (vs. 8) is reminiscent, of course, of the similar imagery in vision II with regard to the martyrs of the fifth seal and the great multitude of the "Spotlight" section (6:9–11 and 7:9–17, respectively). It should also be noted that the sequence in vision VII concludes, interestingly enough, with a further reference to the "bride"—namely, John's view of the Holy City, New Jerusalem, descending from God out of heaven "as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev 21:2).

Introduction to Vision VIII

Text: 21:5–11a (and reference to verses 1–4 as background)

Summary: In the context of the "new heaven" and "new earth," with "the holy city, New Jerusalem," having come down from God out of heaven, John now beholds the one sitting upon the throne. This Divine Being—God Himself in previous visions—declares, "Behold, I make all things new." Then He speaks to John, saying, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true," and further declares to John, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega…." A twofold judgment is declared: inheritance of all things for the conqueror; but destruction in the lake of fire, "which is the second death," for those who are not conquerors. Then one of the angels with the seven bowls of wrath takes John to a high mountain, showing him the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God and having the glory of God.

Comment: In contrast to the introductory scenes for visions II–VII, where the setting was in each instance clearly still in heaven, now there is a backdrop that has an earthly setting—a parallel to the situation with respect to vision I. In vision VIII, this introductory scene deals indeed with a tabernacle or temple setting, but whether the scene itself as given in 21:5–11a is intended to be basically from the earthly perspective or to be a *transitional* one from heaven to earth is not absolutely clear (nor is it of material importance to our study). In 21:3, the declaration is made, of course, that God's tabernacle is on earth after the descent of the Holy City (vs. 2), and this final portion of vision VII would seem to provide the setting for our opening scene in vision VIII (which itself, however, also replicates a description of the descent of the New Jerusalem [21:10]). In any case, the main point is that the focus of this introductory scene has shifted from the temple in heaven in such a way as to place emphasis once again on an earthly venue. The actual temple imagery utilized will be treated more fully later in this article.

2. Some Implications of the Structure

The summaries provided in the preceding section of this article have brought to attention several elements concerning the introductory scenes to the eight main visions of the Apocalypse. Prominent among these features are the following: (1) the pervasiveness of temple imagery in the settings of these scenes, (2) positive and negative thrusts within the scenes, (3) a certain dynamic or movement both in the temple imagery throughout and in the negative judgment symbolism that appears in visions III–VI, and (4) a special similarity structurally and contentwise between the first and eighth visions. We will now give somewhat further attention to these elements, but as a preliminary step will first take brief notice of the kind of relationship that the introductory scenes hold to their own prophetic sequences.

Introductory Scenes and Their Respective Prophetic Sequences

In any analysis of the introductory scenes for the eight major visions of the book of Revelation, the logical and basic first consideration is the fact that there is a close relationship between these scenes and the remainder of the prophetic sequences which they introduce. Thus, for vision I the portrayal of Christ as walking among the seven lampstands/churches fittingly precedes His counsels to those churches, and for vision II the scene with the Lamb proclaimed worthy to open the seven-sealed scroll and then actually taking that scroll from the hand of the One seated on the throne provides an appropriate backdrop for the Lamb's actual breaking of the seals.

These introductory scenes provide in this way a positively oriented setting—a message of assurance, as it were—that relates to the sequence that ensues. In the first instance, Christ assures His people of His presence with them in their struggles against deception and persecution—struggles which require from Him words of counsel and encouragement, and frequently rebuke (chaps. 2 and 3).

Likewise, in the second vision there is assurance that the forces released by the breaking of the seals are within the redemptive framework of the slain Lamb's work in heaven that will eventually result in opening the book of eternal destiny for the Lamb's faithful ones.[15] The seals are successively opened in chapters 6 and 8:1, intensifying at each step the progression, until a dramatic silence occurs as the scroll itself is finally to be opened. The "interlude" in chapter 7 is very visibly an appropriate "Spotlight on Last Events" for this particular sequence. By its highlighting of the *sealing* of God's servants, there is in this "Interlude" a sort of play on the "seal" terminology. But the whole concept of ownership and preservation inherent in the symbolism of "seal" also very directly connects this scene in chapter 7 with the breaking of the seals:[16] God's 144,000 sealed ones are protected from the ravages of the horsemen of the first four seals,[17] and even in the sort of martyrdom portrayed in the fifth seal they can rest in full assurance of God's care.[18] This emphasis on God's care is highlighted further in the depiction in sections *b* and *c* of chapter 7 (vss. 9–17) of the great multitude coming out of great tribulation (these, like the martyrs in the fifth seal, have white robes!).

The foregoing illustrates the manner in which there is close correlation between the victorious-introduction scenes and the remainder of the respective visions which these scenes introduce, and it will not be necessary to elaborate here beyond these two samples. In fact, a quick review of the main content of each vision may be obtained by consulting section 2 of chapter 2 in this volume. The one additional observation that should be made here is that although all the victorious-introduction scenes have a positive note of assurance for Christ's loyal ones, some—especially those for visions III–VI (the twofold series with the "Exodus-from-Egypt"/"Fall-of-Babylon" motif—also portray negative aspects. This matter will receive further attention below.

The Temple Imagery and Its Significance

As we have observed, temple imagery is pervasive in the introductory scenes to the eight main prophetic sequences in Revelation. For visions II–VII, the settings are in "the temple in heaven," and "furniture" in that temple comes to view. In vision I, however, the temple imagery is that of lampstands that represent "the seven churches" on earth. And in vision VIII, there is again an earthly venue—but this time in the context of the holy city New Jerusalem and the "new earth," with God Himself "tabernacling" directly with His people (21:3–4) and with "God and the Lamb": described as the "temple" of the New Jerusalem (21:22).

It is immediately apparent that all three of the main NT applications of temple imagery come into play in these introductory scenes. In the first vision, we have the NT concept of the Christian church as the "new temple." The classical *loci* for this concept are undoubtedly 1 Corinthians 3:16–17 and 2 Corinthians 6:16–17, but certainly there is reflection of it in 1 Peter 2:5, as well, and also in the proclamation of James to the Jerusalem council referred to in Acts 15:13–18. In the last-mentioned reference, James makes application of the prophecy of Amos 9:11–12 referring to God's returning to build again the "tabernacle of David," which had fallen down, as being directly applicable to the influx of Gentiles into the apostolic church.

The NT parallel closest to the usage reflected in the introductory scenes for visions II–VII in the book of Revelation is that which is found in the book of Hebrews. There Christ is spoken of as "a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the sanctuary and the true tent which is set up not by man but by the Lord" (Heb 8:1–2; see also vs. 5).[19]

Finally, what is undoubtedly the most basic and central application of NT temple imagery is that which is illustrated in the introductory scene and in the prophetic description in vision VIII of the Apocalypse: namely, a reference to the direct divine presence. In the prologue to the Gospel of John, it is stated that Christ "tabernacled among us" (John 1:14; compare the situation in the "new earth" after the descent of the heavenly Jerusalem, in which it is stated that God now tabernacles with humanity [21:3]). Perhaps an even more forceful reference is that in which Jesus declared, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews understood this as referring to Herod's temple, but the Evangelist made the explanation that "he [Christ] spoke of the temple of his body" and that when therefore Jesus had risen from the dead, His disciples "remembered that he had said this" (John 2:19–22).

The divine presence was the central focus of the ancient tabernacle/temple economy in Israel.[20] Moses was given instruction to build "a sanctuary, that I [God] may dwell in their [Israel's] midst" (Exod 25:8). And when the construction of the tabernacle was complete, "the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle" (Exod 40:34). It is this fundamental thought—that of the divine presence—that likewise pervades the introductory scenes to all eight visions of the Apocalypse. The divine, ever-living Christ is, in the first instance, depicted as present with His people on earth, sustaining them and providing messages to them through His Holy Spirit (vision I);[21] then the scene changes to the heavenly sanctuary, where Christ is actively ministering in behalf of His people (visions II–VII); and finally, when God and the Lamb dwell with redeemed human beings in the "new earth" and "New Jerusalem," there is brought to earth the very ultimate in closeness and tangibility of the divine presence (vision VIII).

Positive and Negative Elements in the Introductory Scenes

As noticed earlier, the victorious-introduction scenes for visions I and II contain only a positive thrust, but the third introductory scene adds also a negative element. In this third scene, the positive emphasis is found in the mingled incense-smoke and prayers of the saints ascending to God, and the negative aspect is described in terms of the angel's throwing a censer of live coals to earth, with the resulting judgment signs of voices, thunder, lightning, and an earthquake.

In the previous article in this series I pointed out that the visions from III through VI consist of a twice-repeated motif that may aptly be designated as the "Exodus-from-Egypt"/"Fall-of-Babylon" motif. (See diagram 2 on the next page for illustration of the motif.) It is interesting that it is precisely in conjunction with these four visions that the strongest references to negative judgment occur. There is also a progression of intensity in the judgment symbolism, as we will observe shortly.

The introductory scenes for visions VII and VIII revert partly to the positive thrust of the comparable sections of visions I and II. However, there is at least an oblique (but nonetheless forceful) reference to negative judgment in each of these final two visions, even though their primary thrust is positive. For vision VII, there is acclamation to God for having judged the harlot and having vindicated the saints. Even so, the blessedness of salvation is the keynote of the anthems of praise; and especially in the references to the Lamb's bride and to the wedding supper of the Lamb is there joy at its highest! For vision VIII, there is inserted within a generally felicitous picture (21:5–11a), one verse that describes those who will meet doom in the "lake of fire" (vs. 8)—a statement obviously presented so as to contrast with the reward of the conquerors or overcomers mentioned just previously (vs. 7).[22]

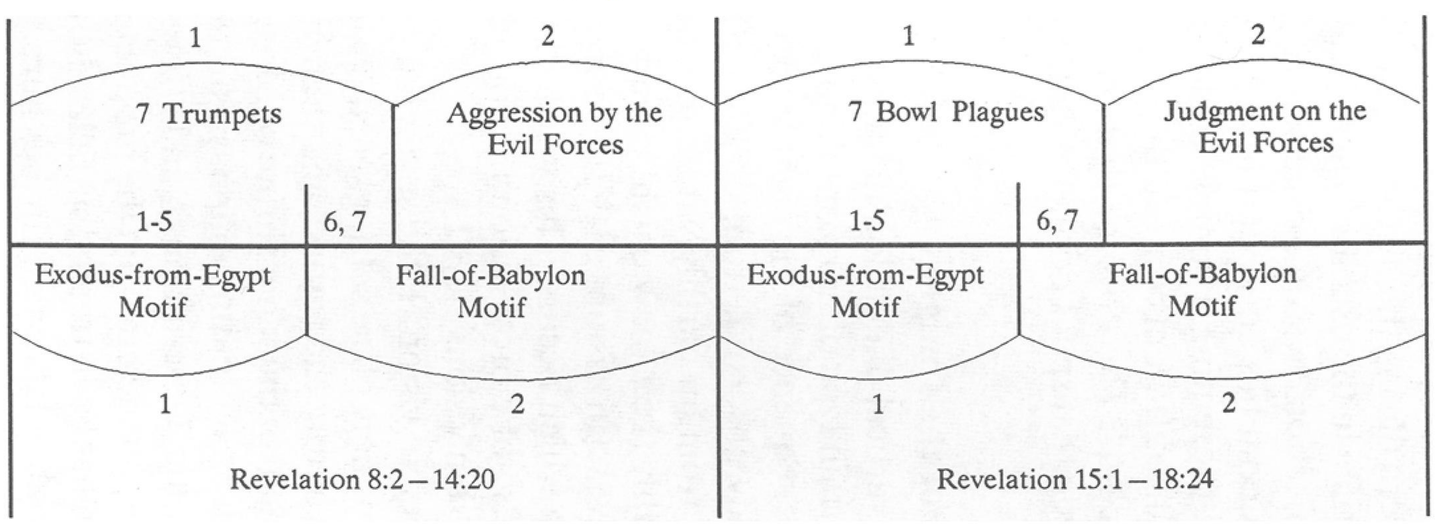


Diagram 2. The "Exodus-From-Egypt"/"Fall-of-Babylon" Motif in Revelation

(This diagram is an enlargement of the one in Kenneth A. Strand, "The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11:3–12," *AUSS* 19 [1981]: 129. The discussion of this motif on p. 128 of that article should also be noted.)

Concerning this positive and negative thrust of the opening and closing victorious-introduction scenes, it appears that the totally positive thrusts of the scenes in visions I and II are not kept fully parallel or balanced in their chiastic counterparts in visions VII and VIII, and this is for good reason: The former refer specifically to ongoing salvific processes, a major theological concern during the historical era; but the latter, by way of contrast, pertain to a time in the eschatological-judgment era when ultimate salvation and glorification await Christ's saints, but where also there are "unsaved" whose doom has now been fully sealed. These "unsaved" cannot be ignored in presenting a complete picture, for as G. E. Mendenhall has pointed out in a different context, the vindication of God's saints has two sides "to the coin": The obverse that represents salvation for the saints has a reverse side that spells doom for those who have been the saints' oppressors.[23]

"Movement" in Portrayal of the Imagery

In addition to a striking vertical dimension manifest in the visions of the Apocalypse, there is a certain type of horizontal movement evident in the symbolic usage within the sequence of the eight "victorious-introduction" scenes. We have already observed, from another perspective, the movement in temple setting from an earthly venue to a heavenly venue and back again to a new earthly (i.e., "new earth") venue. But the heavenly temple scenes themselves (in visions II–VII) show an interesting progression in the symbolism which occurs. This we shall briefly look at, followed by succinct notice also of a progression that occurs in the negative-judgment imagery utilized in visions III–VI.

Temple-in-heaven imagery. In vision II, the seven lamps or torches of fire suggest a first apartment or holy place setting. Next, vision III takes us to the golden altar of incense before the throne, and then vision IV opens to view the ark of God's covenant in the inner shrine or Most Holy Place.[24] This appears to correlate with an increasing emphasis on the end-time in the respective "Basic Prophetic Descriptions" and "Interludes," even though all of these sequences span the era from the prophet's time onward to the end. (This phenomenon has been treated sufficiently in the previous article, and therefore need not be elaborated further here.)

After the chiastic dividing line, the temple imagery no longer embraces temple furniture, for the functions represented by such furniture—or the salvific activities indicated thereby—no longer exist. Rather, smoke fills the temple so that no ministry of mercy continues (15:8); proclamations and/or judgmental signs occur, with only general reference to their source in the temple, from the throne, and/or in heaven (cf. 16:17ff.; 19:1–5; 21:5).

Negative-judgment imagery. The central four visions of the Apocalypse—namely, III through VI—have introductions that set forth strong negative-judgment symbolism. An interesting feature is the intensification of the negative thrust. The signs in vision III are thunder, voices, lightning, and an earthquake (8:5); to these, vision IV adds "heavy hail" (11:19); and finally, vision VI sets forth these same judgment harbingers but intensifies considerably both the earthquake ("such as had never been since men were on the earth," 16:18) and the hail (each hailstone "heavy as a hundredweight," 16:21). Vision V omits this particular series of judgment symbols, possibly because in inaugurating its depiction of the eschatological judgment, its chief emphases already carry a heavy burden of doom: the fullness of God's wrath being carried forth from the temple in the seven bowls and the temple itself as smoke-filled and unoccupied (15:5–8).

In any event, the first doublet of visions with the "Exodus-from-Egypt"/"Fall-of-Babylon" motif (visions III and IV) begins with introductory scenes that already show a progression of intensity of judgment. This intensity is then further enhanced by the symbolic portrayals in the second doublet (visions V and VI). The theological significance here appears to be the concept that increasing woe is commensurate with a pattern of continuing and more flagrant rejection of Christ's offer of salvation. As such, it would be a sort of extended commentary on the principle that Jesus enunciated in declaring that the judgmental doom upon Bethsaida, Chorazin, Capernaum, and other rejecters of His mercy would exceed that of Sodom and Gomorrah (cf., e.g., Matt 10:14–15 and 11:20–24).

Relationship of the Introductions for Visions I and VIII

We have already analyzed the theological significance of the temple imagery in the eight introductory scenes in Revelation. It remains here to call more specific attention to one particular feature—namely, the envelope structure in which the introduction to vision I and that to vision VIII enclose, as it were, the six intervening introductions. The primary feature of the enclosure schema is that of venue—earthly for visions I and VIII, and heavenly for visions II–VII. Thus, the emphasis at both the beginning and the end of the book is on an *immanence* of the divine presence.

Is there here a suggestion, perhaps, of the two advents of Christ and of their ultimate results? In the first introductory scene, John sees the Christ who had come as God incarnate in His first advent—who was killed and then resurrected, and who ascended to heaven after 40 days. Now this same Divine Person appears to John as the one who was dead but lives forever (Rev 1:17–18) and is *present*, walking among His churches/lampstands. This first victorious-introduction scene thus evidences the continuing and close presence of this very Jesus with His church on earth. His own victory during His incarnation has assured the existence of this covenant community itself, and His own divine presence remains verily with His people throughout the historical era (by means of His Holy Spirit).[25] In the fourth Gospel, the prologue refers to Christ's "tabernacling among us" (John 1:14), but the Discourse on the Paraclete indicates that even after Jesus' departure into heaven, both He and the Father would come to make their "home" with Jesus' faithful disciples (see John 14:15–21, 23).

The counterpart to this divine presence in the "here-and-now" is the fullness of experience of the divine presence contingent upon Jesus' second advent to bring rewards to all persons according to their deeds (Rev 22:12). In the final stages of those rewards—that is, in the "new heaven"/"new earth"/New Jerusalem experience—God and the Lamb again "tabernacle" with their people, but now this tabernacling is in an immediate and direct presence (see 21:3, 22; and 22:1–4).

Thus, in the beginning and closing victorious-introduction scenes we find, in a sense, an elaboration of the Apocalypse's twofold theme (called to attention in my earlier article): Christ's presence with His people in this present age as the "Alpha and Omega," and His return at the end of the historical era to usher in those events that will culminate in His presence with His people throughout eternity (cf. Rev 1:7–8 and 22:12–13).

But what function, then, do the introductory scenes for the intervening visions serve? Whereas *immanence* is the emphasis of visions I and VIII, including their victorious-introduction scenes, *transcendence* is the emphasis of the other visions. These six visions highlight activity in heaven, while God's people are on earth. But this transcendence is not by any means aloofness, nor is it any lack of concern and contact between heaven and earth. Rather, all of these visions (through their victorious-introduction scenes, and also their subsequent descriptive sequences) reveal a very decided *vertical continuity*. What is done in the temple in heaven is done for the benefit of God's people on earth, and therefore the heavenly activity portrayed in the victorious-introduction scenes finds an immediate counterpart in forces released on earth in order to accomplish God's purpose for His people.

Broad "Envelope Structures"

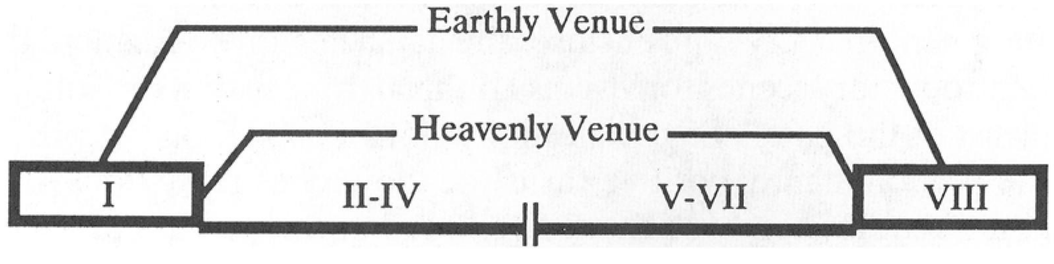
Brief mention should be made of the fact that in the foregoing analysis and discussion we have come upon two broad "envelope structures."[26] One of these we have already discussed in dealing with the venue of the temple imagery: for visions I and VIII, an earthly venue (present-historical and new-earthly, respectively); and for visions II–VII, a setting in the "temple in heaven." The other envelope structure relates to the "Negative-Judgment Imagery" and encloses the harsh negative-judgment thrusts of the introductory scenes for visions III through VI within the solely positive thrust of the paralleling scenes for visions I and II, on the one hand, and the predominantly positive thrust of the scenes for visions VII and VIII, on the other hand.[27] (These two broad envelope structures are set forth in sketch form in diagram 3.)

The two examples of inclusio are of interest from the standpoint of literary artistry, of course. But we must ever bear in mind that this artistry was not utilized as an end in itself; rather, it was incorporated because of, and in relationship to, its functionality for conveying forcefully the theological perspective and motifs that are foundational in the Apocalypse and that constitute the book's primary concern.

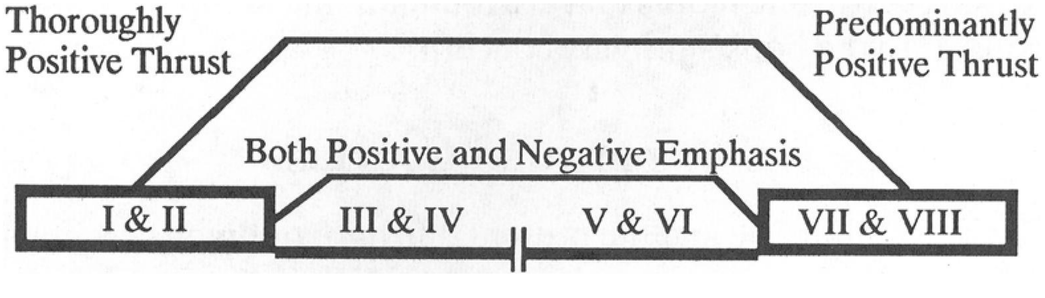
3. Summary and Conclusion

The previous article and the present one have outlined certain literary structures in the Apocalypse and given attention in particular to the victorious-introduction scenes for the eight main visions in the book of Revelation. It is obvious, in the first place, that Revelation is a very neatly organized literary piece. However, the literary patterns represent more than simply aesthetic taste and mnemonic concern; they highlight in a very real way certain major theological themes and motifs. These are themes and motifs that parallel and elaborate aspects of general NT theology, and that are especially valuable in speaking hope and assurance to Christ's loyal followers in their struggle against forces of deception and persecution.

Diagram 3. Two "Envelope Structures" in the Introductory Scenes of the Book of Revelation



1. Earthly and Heavenly Venues



2. Positive and Negative Judgment Emphases

Chapter IV

Interpreting Revelation's Symbolism

Jon Paulien

Editorial Synopsis. Although the apostle John never quotes the OT directly in his writing of the prophecy, it is evident that he draws heavily on its imagery. These allusions, forming as they do a veritable mosaic of OT phraseology, may be classified under two headings: (1) echoes, and (2) direct allusions.

Through the centuries many OT concepts became detached from their scriptural roots to form a pool of symbolic ideas commonly used and understood by everyone. John's use of these common symbols may be termed "echoes" (of the OT); they carry their own significance, apart from their original OT matrix.

On the other hand John sometimes models a given portion of his prophecy on a selection from the OT that he intends his readers to note. Designated as "direct allusions," these OT passages may shed light on the meaning of that portion of Revelation in which John uses the borrowed imagery.

In this chapter the present author classifies "direct allusions" according to their helpfulness in interpreting Revelation and suggests the criteria by which they may be identified as "direct allusions."

> Let none think, because they cannot explain the meaning of every symbol in the Revelation, that it is useless for them to search this book in an effort to know the meaning of the truth it contains. The One who revealed these mysteries to John will give to the diligent searcher for truth a foretaste of heavenly things. Those whose hearts are open to the reception of truth will be enabled to understand its teachings, and will be granted the blessing promised to those who "hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein." (Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* [Mountain View, CA, 1911], 584–85.)

While we must not forget the above counsel, the study guides suggested in this chapter will enable the serious Bible student to mine more accurately the veins of spiritual truth beneath the surface of this crowning prophecy of Scripture.

Chapter Outline

I. The Book of Revelation: Its Nature
II. Interpreting Revelation
III. Conclusion

The Book of Revelation: Its Nature

God has seen fit at every stage in the production of the Scriptures to offer His revelation in language appropriate to the time, place, and circumstances of the original writer. God does not bypass the culture, background, literary style, or ways of thinking of the individuals to whom He reveals Himself. Instead He seeks earnestly to meet them where they are so that they can understand, as far as possible, His revelations to them and through them (cf. 1 Cor 9:19–23).

For example, God presented the same basic message to Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2 as He did to the prophet in Daniel 7. But to the pagan king the nations were portrayed in the form of an idol. This is natural since he understood the nations to be glorious, shining representations of the gods they served. To the Hebrew prophet on the other hand the nations were portrayed as he saw them: vicious, ravenous beasts who were enslaving and destroying his people. God spoke to each within his language and cultural setting in order to communicate a message about His plans for the future.

The words that people use and the meanings that those words carry are the product of a people's past experience. Language is limited in expression to that which is familiar to people in a given time and place. Even the future can only be described in the language of a people's past and present experience.

When the Exodus of Israel from Egypt is described in the OT, for example, the language used reminds the reader of the phraseology by which God's mighty activity in the Creation and the Flood are described in the book of Genesis. For example, both Noah and Moses were delivered by an "ark" coated with pitch.[1] In the Exodus, as at Creation, the divine presence brought light into darkness and a dividing of the waters.[2] Common to all three descriptions are the use of "dry land"[3] and "be fruitful and multiply."[4]

Just as the portrayal of the Exodus makes use of the descriptions of God's previous actions, so the exile to and the restoration from Babylon are described in the prophets by the language of Creation and the Exodus. Creation, for example, is the pattern for Isaiah 65:17–19. The Exodus provides the pattern for a number of the prophets.[5]

In like manner the prophecies concerning the Messiah were voiced in terms of a prophet like Moses, a son of David, and a priest after the order of Melchizedek. God in each case used the language of the past as a tool to communicate His present will and/or His plan for the future.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, to discover that the visions of Revelation are not filled with helicopters, spaceships, computers, and nuclear bombs. Instead, they are couched in the images of the NT church's past. Though originating from the throne of God, Revelation was communicated in language appropriate to the time, place, and circumstances of the human author, John.

"The Bible is not given to us in grand superhuman language. Jesus, in order to reach man where he is, took humanity. The Bible must be given in the language of men."[6] Although a prophecy of future events from the author's perspective, the language of the church's previous experience provided the language with which to describe that future.

While the Bible may often describe our future, it is important to keep in mind that the language through which such prophecies were communicated was the language of another time and place than our own. It is all too easy to impose upon the text meanings more appropriate to our time and place than to the situation within which God originally spoke. Discovering the original meaning of the language of the text safeguards us against our natural tendency to remake the biblical text into our own image.[7]

When we speak of "original meaning," of course, we should not assume that the original author or the original audience fully understood the divine purpose in the revelation communicated to them. What we are saying is that the divine purpose was fully and adequately represented in the feeble and localized expressions of a fallible human writer.[8] Therefore, the original meaning of the language of the text is critical to a correct understanding of Scripture. To apply to the language of the text meanings more appropriate to our time and place is to launch ourselves into a journey to all manner of fantastic destinations which, though they may appear biblical, are in fact contrary to the divine intent for that passage.

Our study of method, therefore, will begin with a careful examination of the language of Revelation in order to determine what procedures are most appropriate to the study of the book. Only as we are patient enough to study Revelation on its own terms will we rightly understand the vision granted to its author.[9]

A Christian Book

It is evident from the very first phrase ("the revelation of Jesus Christ") that Revelation is a Christian book (1:1). Jesus Christ is present everywhere, both explicitly[10] and in symbol.[11] There are references to churches[12] and to the cross.[13] The careful reader also becomes aware of scores, if not hundreds, of echoes recalling NT themes, vocabulary, and theology.[14] Although the book has a different style, vocabulary, and subject matter, we should not expect, therefore, its theology to be radically different from what we find elsewhere in the NT.[15]

A Divine Revelation

According to the preface (1:1–3) the author understands his work to be that of transmitting to the church a visionary message from God. He repeatedly points to a supernatural origin for the scenes portrayed in his book.[16] He considers himself a prophet and his work a prophecy. His authority is equal to that of the apostles and the OT prophets. The "words of the prophecy" are to be obeyed (1:3). Their authority is so unquestionable that not a word is to be added or subtracted (22:18–19).

On the other hand, there is considerable evidence (outlined below) that a multitude of allusions to earlier literature with which John the Revelator was familiar are sprinkled throughout the visions. To what degree is the book visionary and to what degree is it researched, developed, and written by the human author? Fortunately we do not need to make such a difficult distinction. Whether the allusions come from God or are the result of John's meditation upon the visions makes no difference to the result. If, as was pointed out above, God always speaks in the time, place, and circumstances of the original writer, the end product (the text) speaks adequately for both! For the sake of convenience and ease of expression, however, in this chapter we will speak generally in terms of "the author's intent" or "John's intent" without thereby intending to imply that the book is merely a human product.

For Seventh-day Adventists it may be instructive to recall the experience of Ellen G. White, who had visions of heavenly things similar to those of John. Recent study has indicated, however, that she researched long and hard to find the best way to express what she had received in language that would be appropriate to the readers in her time and place. Visions and research can work together within a single human being to produce a book that imparts communications from the mind of God.

The presence of the divine element in Revelation indicates that the ultimate meaning of the book will often go beyond what the human author might have understood. This, however, does not license interpreters to indiscriminately seek all kinds of extended meanings in the book. Just as God limited Himself when He took on human nature in the incarnation, so He also limited Himself when He chose to express Himself in Scripture through the language of human authors.[17]

While God's intent may transcend the human author's understanding, His intent is expressed by means of the language chosen by the human author. Thus, whatever divine intent is perceived in a passage, it should be a natural extension of the author's own language and purpose.[18]

A Prophetic Book

Related to the matter of the divine intent is the book's claim to provide genuine information with regard to the future. Revelation concerns things that "must soon take place' " (1:1); things that will "take place hereafter" (1:19). It speaks of Christ's return and of One "who is to come" (Rev 1:7–8; 4:8). It promises rewards to the overcomer (Rev 2:7, 11, etc.).

Revelation points forward to a future sealing time (7:1–3); to a future "hour of trial" (3:10; 7:14); to a future redeemed multitude (7:9ff.; 19:1ff.); to a great final proclamation of the gospel (10:8–11; 14:6–12); to a final judgment (11:18; 20:11–15); and to a great, final battle (12–20) climaxing in Christ's coming (14:14–20; 19:11ff.), ushering in God's final, universal rule (11:15–17; 21–22:5). Thus, Revelation is concerned largely with events that are future from the author's perspective.

Setting in Asia Minor

The text of Revelation makes clear that the book was addressed to seven churches in the Roman province of Asia (1:4; cf. 22:16).[19] It should not surprise us, then, if at times the book uses symbols and concepts that occur in nonbiblical literature and mythology. The author didn't necessarily "research" these symbols; they came to him as living expressions that would be familiar to anyone who lived in Asia Minor at the time.[20]

While at first we may be somewhat uncomfortable with the idea that a biblical writer may have employed some mythological figures in his book (for example, seven-headed beasts), we must remember the prophetic nature of Revelation. Prophets used the common language of the time to communicate effectively. Thus, scholars who have found ancient parallels to various parts of the Apocalypse can help us to understand better the intent of the book's imagery.[21]

Apocalyptic Language

It is immediately evident that the book of Revelation is not written in ordinary prose. Right at the beginning the book is declared to be "signified" (1:1, KJV). An eagle speaks, locusts ignore vegetation, a great red dragon chases a woman through the sky, a lion is transformed into a lamb which conquers everything. This is not typical NT language.[22] Revelation is so symbolic that the reader needs to guard against being overly literal in interpretation.[23]

Nevertheless, such cosmic symbolism was a rather common form of literary procedure in those days. Books like Ethiopic Enoch, 4 Ezra, and 2 Baruch express feelings and theology in what has been termed "apocalyptic language."[24] Thus, while the language of Revelation is often strange and symbolic, its message is grounded firmly in reality. Quite likely the first-century Christian reader had relatively little difficulty understanding the main symbols of the book.[25]

The modern-day interpreter of Revelation, then, will need to take into account the apocalyptic literature of the times, which will help him to understand how apocalyptic language was perceived in the first century A.D.

Importance of the Old Testament

While some allusions to nonbiblical sources may appear, it is certain that Revelation cannot be understood without continual reference to the OT.[26] It is "a perfect mosaic of passages from the OT."[27] The all-pervasiveness of the OT in Revelation indicates that it is the major key to unlock the meaning of the book's symbols. The ears of John's audience were far better attuned to pick up OT allusions than is the case with most Christian congregations today.[28] The OT provided a means of "decoding" the message of Revelation that was not available to the outsider.[29]

Our study of Revelation must, therefore, include a thorough understanding of OT history, poetry, language, and themes. Without such an understanding, the meaning of the book remains hidden to a large extent.

Problem of Allusions

To assert that Revelation is saturated with OT concepts does not by itself address the issue of how they are used in the book. A reader thoroughly acquainted with the OT quickly notices that Revelation never quotes the OT.[30] Rather, it alludes to it with a word here, a concept there, a phrase in another place.[31] While it is clear that the OT is basic to any understanding of Revelation, it is not always clear what part of the OT is being alluded to in a given verse.[32]

An exegetical method that will unlock the symbols of Revelation must include guidelines for determining when and in what manner the author is alluding to the OT.

Repetitive Structure

As the reader gains greater familiarity with Revelation, it becomes clear that the book's structure is closely related to its meaning. There are seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls. Many themes and symbols reappear at regular intervals.[33] Almost every passage has parallels elsewhere in the book. Revelation contains such a complexity of interlocking parallels that a given passage may be more closely related to material at the other end of the book than to neighboring passages.[34] Thus, the interpreter needs to have a good knowledge of the structure and content of the entire book and to be aware of the impact of the whole on the passage under study.[35]

A Worship Setting

One of the most striking features of Revelation is its repeated portrayal of worship scenes in heaven, usually in the context of imagery related to the OT sanctuary.[36] Not only are there a great number of hymns in the book,[37] but the very blessings and curses on those who read and hear Revelation imply a public reading of the book in a worship setting (1:3; 22:18–19).

These facts suggest that attention needs to be given to the Christian worship practices of the first century, OT sanctuary imagery, the Jewish synagogue service, and the Aramaic targums that developed in the Jewish synagogues.

Conclusion

The characteristics of the book of Revelation just examined call for attention to method. The proper method for studying Revelation will reflect these characteristics and utilize them to clarify the author's intention. We turn now to a proposed method for "breaking the code" of this fascinating book, with special emphasis on how to discover and validate allusions to John's OT sources.

Interpreting Revelation

The realities previously observed in the text of Revelation suggest that the interpreter should take four fundamental steps in his study: (1) Make a basic exegesis (or explanation) of the passage being studied. (2) Examine relevant parallels in other parts of Revelation. (3) Find the OT root sources of the imagery. (4) Discover if the NT expands the meaning of those symbols in the light of the Christ-event.

Basic Exegesis

The first step toward understanding the message of Revelation is to determine what the author was saying to his original readers in their time, place, and circumstances. The term "exegesis" is a loanword from the Greek which means to "draw out." Thus it has come to designate the process of letting the biblical text speak for itself, rather than imposing on the passage a meaning that originates with the reader. Consequently, basic exegesis gives attention to the meaning of words (by the use of lexicons and theological dictionaries), to syntax (how words relate to each other in a sentence), to the structure of the passage and its immediate context, and to the relationship the passage has to its contemporary situation.

The contemporary situation is clarified by learning what can be known about the first hearers and their social setting, the concerns that prompted the author to write, and parallel literature of the time, if available. Helpful introductions to Revelation can be found in most commentaries and in "Introductions to the NT." For Revelation, an examination of other apocalyptic writings is particularly helpful.

Such methods of exegesis, carefully carried out, yield a reasonably clear understanding of most NT books. But in Revelation they produce an unsatisfying result. It is quite possible in Revelation to know full well what John is saying and still have absolutely no idea what he means.[38] Thus, a broader, more theological method of exegesis is necessary to do justice to the Apocalypse.

Parallels Within Revelation

The next step is to examine how the symbols and structures of a given passage are used elsewhere in Revelation. When the author has clearly defined his intention in the context, it is pointless to search outside the book for creative interpretations. For example, in 3:21 and 11:18 the author has provided an interpretive summary in advance of the material to follow. To ignore that summary in favor of some external "key" would limit, rather than enhance, the understanding of his intention.

Revelation is unique for its incredibly interwoven structure. This is so much so that the key to material at one end of the book may often be found at the opposite end. The immediate context of any passage may be as broad as the entire book. Examples of obvious parallel structures in Revelation include the trumpets and the bowls, and the rider on the white horse in chapters 6 and 19.

The examination of such parallel structures enables the student to apply to difficult passages insights obtained from clearer ones. For example, most exegetes agree that the seven bowls or plagues (chap. 16) are judgments of God on those who have rejected Him. It would appear reasonable, then, to expect a similar theme in the seven trumpets, a segment on which there is little agreement.

The Old Testament Source

The next important step is to determine to which passage(s) of the OT John is alluding.

As we move into this crucial section the reader is reminded of the earlier discussion on the divine/human authorship of Revelation. The impression left by the book is of heavenly visions written out by one who carefully researched his expressions in the OT Scriptures. Since John on Patmos may not have had access to the OT, it is possible that he may have "researched" his memory or had the allusions brought to his mind directly by God.

Whether the allusions arose in the mind of God or of John, however, they reflect both the mind of God and the mind of John to which God revealed Himself. As was pointed out earlier, expressions such as "the author," "John's intent," or "the Revelator cites" are not to be understood to imply that the book of Revelation is merely a human product. Such expressions are merely a convenient way of referring to the complexity of the divine/human authorship of the book in its totality.

It becomes increasingly evident to those who study Revelation in depth that the expressions in the books are thoroughly saturated with OT language, history, and ideas. Thus, it is impossible to understand Revelation rightly if its OT background is not taken seriously.

"We can say in a general way, that until we have succeeded in laying out the Old Testament source for an apocalyptic prophecy, we have not interpreted that passage."[39]

It is only when the OT background is understood that Revelation can be expected to yield secrets that may have been perfectly plain to the first-century reader.[40] The problem is how to know what OT passage(s) John had in mind when he wrote.[41] The revelator never cites the OT, however; he merely alludes to it.[42] The problem of identifying an allusion becomes more complicated when we discover that on many occasions John appears to have quoted loosely from memory,[43] or adapted the OT language to fit his need.[44] It is also quite possible that he used a different text tradition than we have available to us.[45]

To complicate matters even more, the OT is written in a different language from the NT. Thus, OT expressions in Hebrew are found in "translation Greek" in the NT.[46] It would simplify matters a great deal if the author of Revelation had always quoted from a Greek translation of the OT such as the Septuagint. But recent studies have shown Revelation to diverge widely from the Septuagint. It is quite possible that John did the translating,[47] and at times utilized text traditions with which we are relatively unfamiliar, such as the Aramaic targums and the Hebrew text tradition represented at Qumran.[48]

Thus, the search for allusions cannot be considered scientifically complete without a far wider examination of OT sources than has been possible in the past.[49] Fortunately, it is not necessary to identify *every* allusion to the Hebrew Bible in order to respond to Revelation.[50] Nevertheless, careful controls must be put in place if a list of OT parallels to Revelation is to be worth anything.[51] It is interesting to observe that 10 major commentators on the book of Revelation offer widely differing lists of allusions to the OT in the Apocalypse.[52] This demonstrates that the task is not an easy one.

Two kinds of allusions. Before outlining a method for determining the presence of an OT allusion we must distinguish between two kinds of allusions. One kind assumes the author's intention to point the reader to a previous work as a means of expanding the reader's horizons. The portion of the text under study can be understood only in the light of the allusion in its original context.[53] An intentional allusion such as this is called a "direct allusion."

The other kind of allusion, which we will call an "echo," does not depend on the author's conscious awareness of an earlier literary usage.[54] Many of the literary figures in Revelation were "in the air" of the environment in which John lived.[55] Though he utilizes a "live symbol," referred to in dozens of places in the OT, he is not necessarily aware of its history. Rather, he draws from a common stock of language readily understood by his readers.[56]

An echo is thus divorced from its original context. To list OT passages where an echo is found is not helpful. What matters is the basic meaning of the echo. A good example of an echo is the figure of vegetation as a symbol for the people of God. Used with such regularity, it appears to have attained a fixed meaning by NT times.[57] This in no way excludes, however, the possibility that an echo of fairly fixed meaning could be applied differently in different contexts.[58]

To summarize, allusive references to the OT can enter Revelation in two ways. John may use an OT source directly and consciously with its original context in mind. Such an allusion is "willed into being."[59] John is fully conscious of the source as well as its relevance to his composition. He assumes the reader's knowledge of both the source and the author's intention to refer to that source.[60]

On the other hand, the revelator may "echo" OT ideas, the origin of which does not concern him. In an echo he does not point the reader to a particular background source; he merely utilizes a "live symbol" that will be understood generally by his contemporary readers.

The distinction between direct allusions and echoes is very significant for the study of Revelation. In failing to make this distinction, commentators have at times interpreted echoes as though the author intended his reader to incorporate a source context into his understanding of Revelation. The distinction between allusions and echoes actually calls for two different approaches to interpretation, depending on the nature of the author's relationship to a particular source in a given passage.[61]

Direct allusions. The presence of a direct allusion requires the interpreter to trace the material to its source.[62] John assumes that the source literature is familiar and that the reader can draw insights from the context of the source that enhance his understanding of the prophecy of Revelation. But in order to handle direct allusions properly, it is necessary to identify their sources correctly.

The procedure for identifying direct allusions works by a process of elimination. Suggested parallels may be gathered from commentaries, marginal references, and lists of OT allusions. These are then examined to see if they meet one or more of the three criteria for a direct allusion (see below). The more criteria a reference meets, the more likely it is that John had this particular OT passage in mind when he wrote that portion of Revelation. The three criteria are as follows:

1. Verbal parallels. The term "quotation" is not clearly defined in the literature.[63] However, a worthwhile definition is given by Trudinger:[64] "One can be said to be quoting when one uses word combinations in a form in which one would not have used them had it not been for a knowledge of their occurrence in this particular form in another source."

By this definition it is evident that the term "quotation" can only rarely, if ever, be applied to the revelator's use of the OT. Only on occasion does John use more than three or four words in the same sequence in which they are found in the OT.[65] Thus, verbal parallels must be understood in a broader sense than quotations.

A verbal parallel, therefore, is defined as occurring whenever at least two words of more than minor significance (articles, prepositions, and minor conjunctions are normally excluded) are parallel between a passage in Revelation and a passage in the Septuagint or other first-century A.D. version.[66] These two major words may be coupled together in a phrase, or they may even be separated—provided they are in clear relationship to each other in both passages of the suggested parallel.

Verbal parallels are discovered by placing the text of Revelation side by side with the potential source text. Wording that is exact or similar is underscored, and the potential relationship between the passages is assessed on a preliminary basis.

A good example of a verbal parallel is found in Revelation 9:2, "And the smoke of the pit went up like the smoke of a great furnace" (trans. by author). This bears a striking resemblance to the wording of Exodus 19:18 in the Septuagint.[67] An example of a verbal parallel where two key words are not intimately connected grammatically can be seen by comparing Revelation 9:2 with Genesis 1:2.[68] The more major words that are found in common, the greater the likelihood that a direct allusion is present. A direct allusion is not to be assumed with every verbal parallel; the observation of common wording is only part of the process of accumulating evidence for a direct allusion.

2. Thematic parallels. Many times the revelator clearly has an OT passage in mind but uses a different Greek word from the Septuagint, or uses only a single word to make the connection. This should not be surprising. Allusions by their very nature are not bound to reproduce the precise wording of the original.[69] They may involve ideas as well as wording, and include both similarity of theme and deliberate contrast.[70] Such single-word parallels are distinguished from "echoes" in that there is an apparent thematic relationship between the contexts in which the parallel words are found.

Thematic parallels can be found not only by comparing with the Septuagint, but also by comparing the intent of the Greek of Revelation with the Hebrew and Aramaic OT.[71] Such Greek/Semitic equivalents are placed in a separate category because of the greater level of uncertainty as to the author's intention.

An example of a thematic parallel is given by Tenney.[72] He notes that while the term "almighty" occurs many times in the OT, only in Amos 4:13 (LXX) is it used in a context that is parallel to Revelation 1:8. The concept of parallel contexts provides a safeguard against indiscriminate selection.

Another thematic parallel may be found by comparing Revelation 9:4 and Ezekiel 9:4. In both cases a mark is placed on the forehead for the purpose of protection against the judgments of God. The two passages are clearly parallel even though a different Greek word for "mark" is used.[73] However, it is not to be assumed automatically from this parallel *alone* that the revelator was pointing to Ezekiel 9:4. But the observation of this similar theme is part of the process of accumulating evidence to determine John's intention.

3. Structural parallels. At times the seer of Revelation uses the OT by building on the literary or theological structure of whole sections without necessarily following the exact wording.[74] A structural parallel occurs when John models a given passage on an OT text, utilizing its language and themes in roughly the same order.

A good example of such a structural parallel can be seen by comparing Revelation 9:1–11 with Joel 2:1–11. Notice that both passages begin with a trumpet call, mention darkness, a locust army, a description of that army, and finally a reference to the leader of that army. Other parallels between the two passages include the anxiety of those affected by the locust army, the darkening of the sun, and the noise of chariots.[75]

Structural parallels are not limited to parallel passages. At times they occur in relation to larger historical or theological structures that go beyond specific OT passages. For example, the seven trumpets as well as the seven last plagues of Revelation are unquestionably parallel to the plagues of the Exodus described explicitly in Exodus 7–12 and other portions of the OT (Pss 78, 105, 135, 136) and implicitly in a multitude of references in the prophets. The OT accounts of Creation, the fall of Babylon and the conquest of Jericho also seem to lie in the background of the material in the seven trumpets.

The above may sound similar to thematic parallels, but there is a subtle and important difference. A thematic parallel is limited to a particular idea in Revelation which has a potential predecessor in a specific OT passage. Along with verbal parallels, thematic parallels make up the basic building blocks by which decisions concerning influence can be made.

In contrast, structural parallels occur if a section of Revelation is based either on a literary predecessor (such as Joel 2:1–11 for Rev 9:1–11) or on a large theological structure such as the Exodus theme. Such structural parallels normally comprise a number of verbal and/or thematic parallels.

Summary of criteria. In order to qualify as a direct allusion to the OT, a word or phrase in Revelation must meet at least one of the above criteria. Many will meet more than one.

Of the three, verbal parallels are often the weakest criterion. Their value as evidence increases, however, as the number of parallel words increases and to the extent that the parallel words are ordered in a similar way in both passages. Since structural parallels consist of a number of interlocking verbal and thematic parallels, they normally constitute the strongest evidence for a direct allusion.

The more criteria a particular proposed allusion fits, the more certain it is that the author consciously molded his passage with that OT context in mind.[76] Certainty is also affected by the number of passages in previous literature in which particular words, concepts, and structures are found. When a given parallel is unique in prior literature, the likelihood that John is directing our attention to that particular passage is correspondingly increased.[77]

Classification of Direct Allusions

Our listing of allusions to the OT in Revelation are only probabilities. The one who creates the list of allusions must, therefore, indicate the level of uncertainty involved and, where possible, the reasons for that uncertainty.

Potential allusions may be classified into five categories of probability: certain allusions, probable allusions, possible allusions, uncertain allusions, and nonallusions.

Certain allusions. These exist when the evidence for dependence is so overwhelming that the interpreter is certain or virtually so that John was pointing to the antecedent text. An example of a certain allusion is the reference to the seventh plague on Egypt in the first trumpet (cf. Exod 9:23–26; Rev 8:7). The plagues of the Exodus are a structural parallel underlying the seven trumpets as a whole.

Thus, we would expect John to reflect specific plagues at various points in the narrative. The action of both the first trumpet and the seventh plague originates in heaven, involves a mixture of hail and fire falling to the earth, and results in destruction to the vegetation of the earth. There is also a thematic parallel: both strokes are divine judgments on those who oppose God and His people. This confluence of evidence lends this direct allusion a high level of certainty that is rare in Revelation.

Probable allusions. Such a classification is assigned a passage when evidence for its relationship is considerable but falls short of complete certainty. An example of a probable allusion is the relationship between the first trumpet and Ezekiel 38:22. The verbal and thematic parallels are virtually as extensive as is the case with Exodus 9:23–26. Not only so, but the combination of hail, fire, *and* blood being used in judgment is unique to Ezekiel 38.

However, the seven trumpets are a portion of Revelation that has only minimal references to Ezekiel, so the structural parallel is absent. Thus, there is enough uncertainty concerning this direct allusion to cause it to be classified as "probable" rather than "certain." Nevertheless, since both certain and probable allusions are considered likely to have been in the mind of the revelator when he wrote, the interpreter should take the source text's original context into account when interpreting the passage in Revelation which contains the allusion.

Possible allusions. With a possible allusion there is enough evidence to indicate that John *may* have been making a direct allusion to the OT passage, but not enough to be reasonably certain. An example of a possible allusion is the relationship between the first trumpet and Isaiah 30:30.

In Isaiah 30:30 fire and hail are poured out as judgments on the Assyrians. However, though the first trumpet contains a verbal and a thematic parallel to Isaiah 30:30, there is no structural parallel to speak of, and the other parallels are relatively weak. Thus, it is possible that John had this OT passage in mind when he wrote the first trumpet, but there is not enough evidence for a reasonable certainty. Such a parallel may be instructive to the interpreter but should never be used as the sole evidence for an interpretation.

Uncertain allusions. These seem to have some parallel ideas, but the allusions are very weak. Nonetheless, the interpreter cannot conclusively deny that they are direct allusions.

In the margin of the Nestle-Aland twenty-sixth edition of the Greek New Testament, Ezekiel 5:12 is listed as parallel to the first trumpet. The lack of verbal and thematic parallels indicates that it is uncertain that John had Ezekiel 5:12 specifically in mind here, although the expression "third part" is present in both passages. But if the concept of a "third" was drawn from the OT, it was probably based on Ezekiel 5:1–4 or Zechariah 13:8–9 rather than on this passage.[78] The context of an uncertain allusion should not be used in interpreting Revelation, but it could be a source for defining one or more "echoes."

Nonallusions. The category of "nonallusions" is relevant only when evaluating lists of suggested allusions. After examination, the interpreter concludes that there is no evidence that the author intended a parallel between the two texts. Eugen Hühn, for example, felt that the first trumpet made reference to Isaiah 2:13 in which trees are used as a symbol of the proud and haughty whom God will humble.[79] The absence of a verbal parallel in the Greek, and of any thematic or structural parallels, denies this suggested parallel the status of a direct allusion. Isaiah's definition of trees, however, may be "echoed" by John in the first trumpet.

The conclusions of such study must, of course, remain somewhat tentative. But it is not necessary to trace every parallel to the OT in order to understand the basic message of the book.[80] While the interpreter must be open to new evidence that may cause particular parallels to be reevaluated from time to time, the above procedure places on a more objective basis the interpretation of direct allusions to the OT in Revelation.

The New Testament

We have noticed already that the book of Revelation is a Christian book and is filled with a multitude of parallels to the other books of the NT. What we have in the Apocalypse is a statement from Jesus in "many, many pictures."[81] As a veritable summary of the NT message, it is rightly placed at the end of the NT canon.[82]

Drawing parallels from both Testaments suggests that the book of Revelation is virtually a summary statement of the themes of the whole Bible.[83] One scholar calls the Apocalypse "the finale of the Biblical symphony."[84] Another states, "in this book all the other books of the Bible end and meet."[85]

The author of Revelation, therefore, does not use the language and ideas of the OT in a woodenly literal fashion.[86] The meaning which the OT allusions suggest for the symbols of Revelation must be seen in the light of the Christ-event.[87] The victory of Jesus Christ is the new organizing principle of history in Revelation.[88]

It is clear that his experience with Jesus and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (1:10) has led John to Christianize the OT materials with which he was working.[89] Thus, we too must interpret these concepts through the prism of the Christ-event.[90] The best way to do this is to seek out NT parallels for the OT expressions in Revelation. This process can proceed by means of the same method used to determine OT allusions in Revelation.

The writers of the NT understood Christ to be the fulfillment of the basic intent of the OT.[91] This is true not only of selected Messianic prophecies, but of the entire spectrum of OT history. Jesus is the new creation (2 Cor 5:17), born by means of the Spirit that overshadows Mary (cf. Luke 1:35 with Gen 1:2). He is the new Adam (Rom 5 and 1 Cor 15): made in the image of God (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15), married to a new Eve (Eph 5:32–33—the church), and in full dominion over the earth (John 6:16–21), over the fish of the sea (Luke 5:1–11; John 21), and over every living thing (Mark 11:2).

Jesus Christ is a new Moses (John 5:45–47) who is threatened at His birth by a hostile king (Matt 2), spends 40 days fasting in the wilderness, rules over 12 and ordains 70, gives the law from a high mountain (Matt 5:1–2), feeds His people with bread from heaven (John 6:28–35), and ascends to heaven after His resurrection. He is the new Israel, who comes out of Egypt (Matt 2), passes through the waters (Matt 3:13–17), is led by the Spirit into the wilderness, passes through the waters a second time (Luke 12:50—baptism at the cross) and enters the heavenly Canaan.

Such examples could be multiplied. In the NT Jesus is the new Isaac, the new David, the new Solomon, the new Elisha, the new Joshua, and the new Cyrus. The NT writers see Jesus' life, death, and resurrection as fulfilling the whole experience of God's people from Adam to John the Baptist.

How was the Christian to relate to this history? In fulfilling the whole OT in His own experience, Jesus was actualizing that experience for all who are "in him." In Him the believer becomes a true Israelite (Gal 3:29; Acts 13:32–33; 2 Cor 1:20) when he confesses that Jesus is the Messiah (John 1:47–50), the One who was to fulfill the hopes of Israel. Thus the whole OT is made relevant to the Christian's experience. The believer in Christ is part of a new Israel.[92] "There is no change in the phraseology employed in the New Testament, but there is positively a change regarding the people to whom these prophecies and designations now apply. In the NT, the church is spoken of in the language employed in the OT concerning Israel."[93]

The NT transfer of the term "Israel" from the Jewish nation to the church has a profound impact on the way OT history and prophecy is placed in the service of the church. The NT universalizes the covenant promises.[94] Israel is no longer to be seen in ethnic or geographic terms (1 Pet 2:4–10; James 1:1), the Shekinah is seen in the gathering of those who believe in Jesus (Matt 18:20). The true temple on earth is spiritual and worldwide, modeled after the true tabernacle in heavenly places.[95] Babylon and Egypt are also spiritualized and represent the enemies of the church.

Thus, OT imagery should not be woodenly applied to the book of Revelation. Like the authors of the NT, John is fully conscious of the impact of the Christ-event on spiritual realities. Unless the significance of Jesus Christ and His cross is allowed to permeate the symbols of Revelation, the resulting interpretation will not be a Christian one, no matter how often Christ may be named in its explication.[96]

Conclusion

Because of space limitations this chapter has been too brief to lay out all the implications of an exegetical method for the study of Revelation. Thus, aspects of the method that might be pertinent to the specialist have been left out. Those who would like to explore in depth the issues involved in the application of the method to the complexities of the original languages would be advised to examine my more technical book on the subject.[97]

The method cannot be learned by the mere reading of this chapter. It must be discovered in hands-on experience with the text. The more time one spends examining verbal, thematic, and structural parallels, the more of a feel one has for the dynamics involved in the author's use of language.

In determining where the author is making a direct allusion we are dealing in probabilities. Where we are uncertain whether John is making a direct allusion, it would be best to leave the OT context out of the discussion of that particular text in Revelation.

While not unreasonable, it is not historically certain that the author of Revelation had access to any of the NT documents (his knowledge of NT teaching may have come through direct experience with Christ, oral tradition, and/or documents now lost to history). Thus, it is generally safer to assume that John builds on a commonly understood tradition rather than upon particular NT documents.

No doubt the nonspecialist reading this chapter will feel discouraged about the possibilities of using such a method. With little experience in the practice of exegesis, little or no knowledge of Jewish apocalyptic or of the cultural setting of first-century Asia Minor, no knowledge of Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic, most readers will be tempted to throw up their hands in despair.

Fortunately, while the aforementioned knowledge and skills are extremely helpful, they are rarely critical to the interpretation of the book of Revelation. For example, the vast majority of allusions to the OT in the book of Revelation are plainly evident even in English translation. The apocalyptic images of Revelation are certainly strange; but for those who are familiar with the OT, the book loses a great deal of its strangeness.

It is to be granted, of course, that the scholarly specialist's abilities and training can safeguard him/her from faulty judgments based on inadequate information. However, individuals not familiar with the original languages or with ancient background materials can contribute a great deal to the church's ongoing growth in this area by the application of other safeguards such as the following:

1. At every opportunity for study the student of Revelation should pray earnestly for a learning attitude and an openness to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Without prayer and the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, the work of even the finest scholar may subtly go astray. Divine intent is not mastered by secular minds. The united testimony of Scripture is that God's "thoughts are not your thoughts" (Isa 55:8) and spiritual things "are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor 2:14).

2. The use of several translations can safeguard Bible study from the occasional aberration introduced by faulty translation or by errors in manuscript transmission. These can be supplemented by the use of an analytical concordance, such as Strong's or Young's, that will lead the student back to the original wording without the need to learn an unfamiliar alphabet.

3. The bulk of one's Bible study time should be spent in the sections of Scripture that are reasonably clear. It is through the clear passages of Scripture that unclear passages, such as the seals and trumpets of Revelation, can be understood more accurately. Excessive fascination with problematic texts and issues can result in gradual distortion of understanding, leading to narrow and often fanatical views that will divide the church.

4. The results of detailed study, such as concordance searches and allusion analysis, should be compared with much general reading of the Scriptures lest the obsession with detail lead one away from the central thrust of the passages being studied. It is possible to prove almost anything with a concordance. This danger is minimized, however, when each passage is understood in the light of much general reading of the Scriptures in context, preferably in a clear and up-to-date translation where the broad context can be seen to emerge.

5. Sound methods should be applied to the contributions Ellen White offers to the understanding of difficult texts.[98] Much harm can be done when her authority in the church is used in a haphazard way, resulting in a distortion of the Scripture writer's intention. Rightly understood, inspiration harmonizes with itself. Principles 3 and 4 above apply also to the Spirit of Prophecy writings.

6. It is wise for individual interpreters to be open to the constructive criticisms of their peers, particularly those who disagree with them. Those who disagree with us often can point to realities in the text that we have missed because of our own narrow perspective. Such criticism is particularly valuable when it comes from individuals who are gifted with unusual ability and/or with tools, such as the knowledge of the original languages, that can aid in exegesis.

In conclusion, the task outlined in this chapter is not an easy one, but it is an exciting one. Through a careful application of the method, Bible students can gain a deeper understanding of the message of Revelation. As such understandings are shared within the body of the church, mutual correction can take place. Together, we can grow in our understanding of Revelation and move toward that promised great revival.[99]

Chapter V

Sanctuary Typology

Richard M. Davidson

Editorial Synopsis. Even a casual reading of the Scriptures reveals that God speaks to His people in a variety of ways. Typology is one of those methods by which the Holy Spirit explained in a concrete or pictorial manner the various facets of spiritual truth. The mind grasps symbolic representation more readily than it does abstract reasoning. In this chapter the writer defines biblical typology as "divinely-designed prefigurations (in the form of persons/events/institutions) that point forward to their antitypical fulfillment in Christ and gospel realities brought about by Christ." A significant portion of inspired Scripture rests on this substructure of OT type and NT fulfillment.

Israelite worship centered in the rites and festivals of the temple-sanctuary system. More than ritual, however, the system itself composed an integrated typology that foreshadowed the Christ-event and the complete carrying out of the plan of salvation.

The NT recognizes a threefold fulfillment of all OT types—including that of the institution of the sanctuary. Thus, sanctuary typology finds in the NT (1) a Christological fulfillment—in that Christ is perceived as the true temple Himself (John 1:14; 2:21); (2) an ecclesiological fulfillment—in that the church is understood as the temple of God (1 Cor 3:16–17; 2 Cor 6:16); and (3) an apocalyptic fulfillment—in that Christ ministers the merits of His sacrifice in the antitypical heavenly sanctuary, in the presence of God for us, a ministry that concludes with final judgment (Heb 8:1–2; 9:24; Rev 3:5).

It is not surprising, therefore, to discover that John's visions of the celestial realities center in the heavenly temple-sanctuary. The focus on this sanctuary as the location of all divine redemptive activity is an integral part of the literary arrangement of the Apocalypse. Each of its major visionary sequences (whether seven or eight, scholars differ on numbering) begins with a heavenly temple-sanctuary setting that affects the interpretation of the subsequent prophecy.

Revelation features both linear and recapitulation progressions. While the individual sequences—such as the churches, seals, and trumpets—follow a recapitulation movement (like the four visions of Daniel), the temple-sanctuary introductory scenes appear to allude to the important sanctuary themes in a linear manner. Two progressions have been identified: (1) Themes linked to the yearly festival cycle are alluded to in their normal calendar sequence: Passover/Feast of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Feast of Tabernacles. (2) Themes linked to priestly service are also alluded to in their natural succession of the daily (*tāmîḏ*) ministration and the yearly (Day of Atonement) ministration of final judgment. These portrayals of sanctuary typology illuminate the antitypical, twofold high priestly ministry of Christ in the heavenly temple-sanctuary.

Thus, the sanctuary typology in the book of Revelation provides an important key for the full interpretation of its messages for the church, and especially so in the end-time.

Chapter Outline

I. Biblical Typology
II. Understanding Sanctuary Typology in Revelation
III. Sanctuary Typology in the Literary Arrangement
IV. Conclusion
V. Charts 1–4

Biblical Typology

Introduction

In recent years a number of scholars have underscored the importance of typology for the NT writers. Chart 1 (see p. 127) samples some of these modern assessments and summarizes by comparing the two major views of biblical typology that have vied for attention in the scholarly world: the traditional and the "postcritical."[1]

In my published dissertation, I sought to determine the true nature of biblical typology. Its basic characteristics emerged from an analysis of representative Scriptural passages. These were clearly typological because the Bible writers employed the hermeneutical terms *tupos* (type) or *antitupos* (antitype).[2] The following basic elements of biblical typology have consistently emerged from this study:[3]

Basic Elements

Historical element. The historical element underscores the fact that typology is rooted in history. Three crucial aspects are involved. (1) Both the type and antitype are *historical realities* whose historicity is assumed and is essential to the typological argument. For example, historical persons (Adam, etc.), events (Exodus, Flood), or institutions (sanctuary) are used as prefigurations. (2) Their antitypes in the NT are likewise historical realities. There is a *historical correspondence* between type and antitype which moves beyond general parallel situations to specific corresponding details. (3) There is an *escalation* or *intensification* from the type to antitype.

Prophetic element. The prophetic aspect of biblical typology involves three essential points. (1) The OT type is an *advance-presentation* or prefiguration of the corresponding NT antitype. (2) The type is *divinely designed* to prefigure the NT antitype. (3) There is a *must-needs-be* quality about the OT type, giving it the force of a predictive foreshadowing of the NT fulfillment. For example, Adam is seen as a "type of the one who *was to come*" (Rom 5:14).

Eschatological (end-time) element. This element of typology further clarifies the nature of the prophetic correspondence and intensification between type and antitype. The OT realities are not just linked to any similar realities, but to an end-time fulfillment. Three possible kinds of eschatological fulfillment may be in view under this heading: (1) *inaugurated*, connected with the first advent of Christ; (2) *appropriated*, focusing on the church as she lives in tension between the "already" and the "not yet"; and (3) *consummated*, linked to the apocalyptic second coming of Christ.

Christological (Christ-centered)-soteriological (salvation-centered) element. This aspect of typology points out its essential focus and thrust. The OT types are not merely "bare" realities, but *salvation realities*. They find their fulfillment in the person and work of Christ and/or in gospel realities brought about by Christ. Christ is thus the ultimate orientation point of OT types and their NT fulfillments.

Ecclesiological (church-related) element. This characteristic of biblical typology points to three possible aspects of the church that may be involved in the typological fulfillment: the *individual worshipers*, the *corporate community*, and/or the *sacraments* (baptism and Lord's Supper).

Putting this all together, we may define biblical typology as a NT study of the OT salvation historical realities, or *types* (persons, events, institutions), that God designed to correspond to, and predictively prefigure, their intensified antitypical fulfillment aspects (inaugurated, appropriated, consummated) in NT salvation history. In sum, the traditional view of typology, not the postcritical position, is affirmed by the data of Scripture (see chart 1, p. 127).

These five basic elements of typology undergird the entire range of references and allusions to the sanctuary in the book of Revelation, thus indicating the typological nature of this material.[4] A closer look at the implications drawn from the characteristic elements of biblical typology helps to clarify the nature of sanctuary typology in the Apocalypse.

Implications From the Historical Element

The *historical element* of biblical typology is crucial, because it underscores the literal, spatiotemporal reality of the heavenly sanctuary as described in the book of Revelation. In all biblical typology, both horizontal and vertical, the historical reality of both type and antitype are indispensable to the typological argument.

The case for historical continuity between type and antitype is doubly emphasized in the typology of the sanctuary. The heavenly sanctuary is not only the NT antitypical fulfillment of the OT earthly sanctuary, but it is also the *original, preexistent prototype* after which the earthly sanctuary is modeled.

In the very first instructions regarding the building of the earthly sanctuary, it is implicit that the reality of the earthly is derived from the reality of the heavenly. Exodus 25:40 (cf. Heb 8:5) is the foundational passage affirming the basic continuity between earthly and heavenly sanctuaries.[5] What is implicit in Exodus 25 is made explicit throughout the rest of the OT.

Passages from cultic, narrative, hymnic/wisdom, prophetic, and apocalyptic genres all concur in assigning spatiotemporal reality to the heavenly sanctuary.[6] Scenes from the divine assembly, from heavenly liturgy, from the heavenly court in session,[7] converge in ascribing literal reality to a place in heaven known as the heavenly sanctuary or temple. Undergirding these surprisingly numerous references to the heavenly sanctuary is the consistent biblical world view that refuses to dichotomize reality into literal/earthly on the one hand and non-literal/heavenly on the other.

Throughout the NT this same biblical world view is maintained. Despite some claims to the contrary, evidence is persuasive that the author of Hebrews rejects the dualistic, philonic allegorization of the heavenly world in favor of a real heavenly sanctuary and liturgy. As William Johnsson expresses it, "His [the author of Hebrews] concern throughout the sermon is to ground Christian confidence in objective *facts … Real* deity, *real* humanity, *real* priesthood—and we may add, a *real* ministry in a *real* sanctuary."[8]

It is in this same biblical trajectory that we must place the book of Revelation. One cannot demythologize the reality of the heavenly sanctuary, dismissing it as imagery within the symbolic world of apocalyptic literature. The OT control passages, which clearly form the backdrop to the sanctuary descriptions of Revelation, in all their manifold witness of different writers using different genres (including apocalyptic), unitedly uphold the objective reality of the heavenly sanctuary. The historical element and the vertical dimension of typology do not allow for a different conclusion regarding Revelation.

We must hasten to add, however, that the heavenly sanctuary is not exactly like the earthly sanctuary. The OT already points to a vertical intensification between earthly and heavenly as well as a horizontal intensification between the OT shadow and the NT substance. As Ellen G. White puts it:

> The matchless splendor of the earthly tabernacle reflected to human vision the glories of that heavenly temple where Christ our forerunner ministers for us before the throne of God. The abiding place of the King of kings, where thousand thousands minister unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stand before Him (Daniel 7:10); that temple, filled with the glory of the eternal throne, where seraphim, its shining guardians, veil their faces in adoration, could find, in the most magnificent structure ever reared by human hands, but a faint reflection of its vastness and glory.[9]

But the difference between the earthly and heavenly sanctuary is not that the heavenly is less literal, less real, as our western overdose of Greek dualism might lead us unsuspectingly to suppose. Perhaps C. S. Lewis points the way toward an antidote for this equation of heavenly with nonliteral. In his book, *The Great Divorce*, he effectively delivers the message that heavenly realities are not *less*, but *more* real.[10]

According to the testimony of John the Revelator, the heavenly sanctuary is not a metaphor for heaven, but a place *in heaven* (11:19; 14:17; 15:5). Ellen G. White, here again, seems to be on the mark and in harmony with the cumulative testimony of Scripture when she takes very literally John's view of the heavenly sanctuary:

> As in vision the apostle John was granted a view of the temple of God in heaven, he beheld there "seven lamps of fire burning before the throne." Revelation 4:5. He saw an angel "having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne." Revelation 8:3. Here the prophet was permitted to behold the first apartment of the sanctuary in heaven; and he saw there the "seven lamps of fire" and "the golden altar," represented by the golden candlestick and the altar of incense in the sanctuary on earth. Again, "the temple of God was opened" (Revelation 11:19), and he looked within the inner veil, upon the holy of holies. Here he beheld "the ark of His testament," represented by the sacred chest constructed by Moses to contain the law of God.[11]

In a swift sweep through the biblical witness she summarizes the consistent biblical picture: "Moses made the earthly sanctuary after a pattern which was shown him. Paul teaches that that pattern was the true sanctuary which is in heaven. And John testifies that he saw it in heaven."[12]

Recent research by systematic theologian Fernando Canale[13] has shown how the major theological systems of traditional Christian thought (Protestant, Catholic, and postmodern ecumenical) have been built upon the Platonic paradigm of the "timelessness" of God. However, the sanctuary doctrine of Scripture reveals this fundamental paradigm to be a distortion of biblical reality.

According to Scripture God is not essentially incompatible with space and time; He is the very God who has dwelt "from the beginning" (Jer 17:12) in a heavenly palace or temple; who truly dwelt in the sanctuary in the wilderness and in the Jerusalem Temple; who, in the ongoing work of redemption, is now engaged in a real, historical-temporal activity in a real spatiotemporal heavenly sanctuary.

Thus, the sanctuary integrates and constitutes the whole flow of the history of redemption. It is the only foundation for theodicy—the vindication of God. And with redemption complete the sanctuary will reach its goal when God literally—in space and time—"tabernacles" with us forever (Rev 21:3). The implications of Canale's consistent application of the biblical paradigm as revealed in the spatiotemporal reality of the sanctuary are indeed profound.

Another part of the problem in dealing with the nature of the heavenly sanctuary stems from an additional inroad of Greek dualism into our thinking. Greek dualism makes a dichotomy between *literal* and *symbolic*. According to the biblical view, however, many concrete realities are at the same time both literal and symbolic. We may illustrate this point with the typology of Flood and baptism in 1 Peter 3 and the Exodus/sacramental typology of 1 Corinthians 10. Both type and antitype of these examples are historical realities. But let us note the fact that baptism and the Lord's supper (the antitypes) are very real, literal entities. Yet at the same time they symbolize or point to important spiritual truths beyond themselves. In the same way Scripture upholds the literal reality of the heavenly sanctuary and its liturgy, and at the same time these very realities point beyond themselves to ultimate spiritual truths (for example, the lamps representing the Holy Spirit, Rev 4:5).

Two dangers must be avoided. We can concentrate solely on the "heavenly geography" and lose the spiritual messages that are communicated. But we can also spiritualize away the spatiotemporal reality and thereby lose both the literal substance and spiritual truth.

Implications From the Prophetic Element

The *prophetic element of biblical typology* is important as it underscores the prospective/predictive nature of sanctuary typology. John did not "reinterpret" the OT sanctuary into a type of the heavenly sanctuary. Rather, the OT foreshadowed the redemptive aspects of the latter.

Inasmuch as biblical types are *divinely designed* to serve as *prospective/predictive prefigurations*, some indication of the existence and predictive quality of the various OT types should occur *before* their antitypical fulfillment. This aspect of typology has not been widely recognized, but such is the consistent pattern that emerges throughout Scripture: the OT types referred to by the NT writers have already been identified as typological *before* the antitypical fulfillment.

Chart 2 (p. 128) illustrates this pattern. The middle column points out the OT verbal indicators of typology. With respect to sanctuary typology, please note item 2 (bolded box in the chart). The earthly sanctuary realities already are indicated as typological in the OT in numerous passages and are in relationship to the heavenly realities. John the Revelator is, therefore, simply announcing the fulfillment of the OT sanctuary types and shadows that pointed to the substance of the heavenly sanctuary and Christ's atoning death and priesthood.

Implications From the Eschatological Element

The *eschatological (end-time) element* of biblical typology is a key to understanding how sanctuary typology is fulfilled throughout the book of Revelation. Chart 3 (p. 129) summarizes the eschatological substructure of NT typology.[14]

In brief, we may say that the OT kingdom prophecies and types have one eschatological fulfillment with three aspects: (1) the basic fulfillment of the OT eschatological hopes centering in the earthly life and work of Jesus Christ at His *first advent*; (2) the derived spiritual fulfillment by the *church*, the body of Christ in the time of tension between the "already" and "not yet"; and (3) the *apocalyptic consummation* and final ushering in of the age to come at the second advent of Christ and beyond.

These three fulfillment aspects may be termed respectively *inaugurated, appropriated*, and *consummated eschatology*. Or, for convenience, they may be designated *Christological, ecclesiological*, and *apocalyptic*.[15]

It should be emphasized (as illustrated in chart 3, p. 129) that the eschatological substructure described above is overarched by a vertical-heavenly dimension. Throughout OT history, throughout the "tabernacling" of Christ on earth, and throughout the existence of the Christian church as the body of Christ, we must recognize the cosmic reality of God's rule. There is a vertical *continuity* throughout salvation history; the connection between heaven and earth is close and decided.

At the same time, until the final climax, there is a vertical *tension*. Man experiences the heavenly things by faith, spiritually; but he is still on earth. Not until the apocalyptic consummation—when the saints go to heaven at the Second Advent, and after the millennium when God's throne is transported to this earth, and "the tabernacle of God is with men"—will the tension between the earthly and the heavenly find complete resolution.

An important implication for sanctuary typology logically follows from the eschatological perspective we have summarized. We would expect the antitypical fulfillment of OT sanctuary typology to correspond to one or more of the three NT eschatological manifestations of the kingdom of God—inaugurated, appropriated, or consummated. Inasmuch as these "kingdom manifestations" are just different aspects of the one eschatological kingdom, it would not be surprising if the antitypical fulfillment of OT sanctuary typology should regularly encompass all three aspects.

The example at the bottom of chart 3 (p. 129) shows this to be the case. Christ is viewed as the antitypical temple (John 1:14; 2:21; Matt 12:6). The church is designated as the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16, 17; 2 Cor 6:16). The heavenly temple overarches the entire end-time fulfillment and comes into particular prominence at the time of apocalyptic consummation (Rev 3:12; 7:15; 11:19; 21:3, 22, etc.; more on these Revelation passages shortly).

Implications From the Christ/Salvation/Church Elements

Once we have recognized the *existence* of the eschatological substructure of NT antitypical fulfillments, it is important to realize the *three different modes* of fulfillment in this substructure. These different *modes* of fulfillment arise from the characteristics of typology involving Christ, salvation, and the church (summarized above, pp. 101–102)

The kingdom of God is Christ-centered. Christ is not the center abstractly, but in saving relation to His people. The kingdom of God shares the same modality as Christ's connection with His people. Thus, the fulfillment of the types shares the same character as the nature of Christ's presence.

For example, at the first advent the kingdom (or rule) of God is *literally* embodied in Jesus (Matt 12:28). The types are fulfilled literally and locally in Him. After Christ's ascension, His kingdom or "rule" is from heaven, and His subjects throughout the world relate to Him only spiritually, by faith. Through His Spirit they receive only the firstfruits, the partial fulfillment of the ultimate gifts He has promised (Rom 8:23). Thus, the nature of the fulfillment in the church on earth is spiritual, universal, and partial. At the same time the sanctuary types have a *literal* fulfillment in the heavenly sanctuary, since Christ is literally present there. At the final consummation Christ is *literally* reunited with His people, and the types have a glorious, final, universal, literal fulfillment.[16]

An Important Key for Interpretation

These hermeneutical insights into the different modes of fulfillment in sanctuary typology help us to reconcile properly our previous conclusion regarding a real, literal heavenly sanctuary with several apparently spiritual/figurative sanctuary allusions. Note the following: the seven lampstands representing the seven churches (Rev 1:12, 20), the souls under the altar of burnt offering crying for vengeance (Rev 6:9–11), and the "court outside the temple" given over to the nations (Rev 11:2). Do these references mitigate against a literal understanding of the heavenly sanctuary scenes in the remainder of the book? To the contrary! A grasp of the eschatological substructure of NT typology provides a key to unlock the consistent and coherent usage of sanctuary typology found in the Apocalypse.

We noted (see chart 3, middle column, p. 129) that in the time of the church the *earthly* antitypes in the spiritual kingdom of grace find a *spiritual* (nonliteral), partial (nonfinal), and universal (nongeographical/ethnic) fulfillment, since they are spiritually (but not literally) related to Christ in the heavenlies. Thus, we should expect that when sanctuary/temple imagery in Revelation is applied to an *earthly* setting in the time of the church, there will be a *spiritual* and not literal interpretation, since the temple is a spiritual one here on earth.

In harmony with this hermeneutical principle, the antitypical lampstands *on earth* in Revelation 1 are not literal but spiritual. The church living between "the already and the not yet" is portrayed elsewhere in Scripture as the antitypical ecclesiological temple. Revelation is consistent with this in utilizing the sanctuary terminology of the lampstands to apply to the spiritual body of the earthly church. Jesus (through His Spirit) is spiritually present with His church on earth.

But in Revelation 4:1, the scene shifts to *heaven*, and John is invited, "Come up hither, and I will show you what must take place after this." Then follows the scene in the heavenly sanctuary where Christ reigns as priest-king. As we have seen, during the time of the church, the earthly spiritual kingdom is overarched by the literal rule of Christ in the heavenlies. Consistent with this NT perspective, the sanctuary typology of Revelation, when focused upon the *heavenly sanctuary*, partakes of the same modality as the presence of Christ, that is, a literal antitypical fulfillment.

We will look at these heavenly sanctuary scenes shortly. But here we note that amidst the heavenly sanctuary scenes of Revelation, there are brief shifts to *earthly* sanctuary allusions. For example, in Revelation 6:9–11 we find mention of the altar (of burnt offering).[17] Since this altar was in the outer court of the earthly sanctuary, and since according to Revelation 11:1–2 the outer court symbolizes earthly and not heavenly things, we must interpret this as a shift to the earthly realm.[18] In harmony with the ecclesiological aspect of the typological fulfillment, we should interpret these earthly references in a spiritual, nonliteral way.

The scene of "souls under the altar" crying out for vengeance alludes to the blood (that is, "the life," Lev 17:11) of the sanctuary sacrifices poured out at the base of the altar (Lev 4:7). The symbolism echoes a reference to the blood of Abel crying to God from the ground (Gen 4:10; cf. Heb 12:24). John makes this connection between the martyrdom of saints and the pouring out of the sacrifice more explicit in Revelation 16:6, in which the wicked are said to have "poured out" (*ekcheō*) the blood of saints and prophets. So, not a literal altar, not literal "souls" under the altar, are in view, but rather an ecclesiological fulfillment in the martyred saints and prophets whose blood spiritually cries out for vindication by God.

Likewise, not a literal "court" is in view in the *earthly* setting of Revelation 11:2, but a "trampling" or persecution of the earthly/spiritual "holy city," the saints, by the "Gentiles," the spiritual enemies of God, for 42 prophetic months.

As we arrive at the closing scenes of Revelation, the apocalyptic fulfillment of sanctuary typology resolves the tension between earthly and heavenly. In the time of the church spiritual Israel is *spiritually* gathered to heavenly Jerusalem on Mt. Zion (Heb 12:22–24). But when "the tabernacle of God is with men" (Rev 21:3, KJV), the Israel of all ages will have been *literally* gathered to their New Jerusalem. After a literal thousand years,[19] the heavenly Jerusalem will have descended literally to this earth. Following the final judgment and cleansing of the earth by fire, the court (a re-created earth after the fashion of Eden) will be united with its center, the literal tabernacle of God, at a literal New Jerusalem.

With these general hermeneutical considerations of the *nature* of sanctuary typology in mind, let us now turn more directly to the *role* of sanctuary typology in the structured flow of the book of Revelation.

Sanctuary Typology in the Literary Arrangement

The literary analysis of Revelation by Kenneth Strand has demonstrated the book's basic chiastic literary arrangement.[20] C. Mervyn Maxwell follows in general the same chiastic outline, with additional insights on certain details.[21] These analyses reveal the paired halves of the book: historical (Rev 1–14) and eschatological (Rev 15–22), as well as the chiastic matching of their corresponding subsections.

Introductory Sanctuary Scenes

Within this overall arrangement of Revelation most of the sanctuary imagery occurs in the scenes that introduce the various vision sequences. Recent studies have indicated the crucial significance of these sanctuary scenes. Maxwell rightly argues that "the heavenly sanctuary is a central pivot of the message of Revelation," and the "sanctuary scenes are landmarks, guiding us to the meaning of Revelation."[22] Strand has shown how the Apocalypse is divided into a series of visionary sequences and how each of the visions opens with an introductory sanctuary scene.[23] Thus the entire book is structured by sanctuary typology.

Allusions to first apartment ministration. Perhaps the most significant insight in these recent studies is the demonstration of how the introductory sanctuary scenes highlight the progression of redemption history within the book of Revelation. The first three sanctuary scenes (Rev 1:12–20; 4–5; 8:2–5) center in, or relate to, the holy place of the sanctuary. Thus, they serve to situate the temporal setting of the scenes within the time of Christ's daily (*tāmîḏ*) holy place ministry.

The first scene (1:12–20) is on *earth* and not in the heavenly sanctuary. Nowhere else in the book is such a concentrated emphasis upon Christ's earthly death and resurrection to be found. At the same time, the explicit mention of seven lampstands recalls the seven-branched lampstand burning continually (*tāmîḏ*) in the holy place of the sanctuary.

The second scene (4:1–5:14) explicitly moves to the heavenly sanctuary (cf. 4:1). Jon Paulien has shown how the thorough mix of imagery from the entire sanctuary, but without the language of judgment, points to a setting of inauguration.[24] Christ, not present in Revelation 4, is in Revelation 5 installed in His ongoing (*tāmîḏ*) work in the holy place[25] of the heavenly sanctuary as a result of His victory on the cross.

The third sanctuary scene (8:2–5) reveals that the basic focus of Christ's ongoing (*tāmîḏ*) ministry is *intercession*. The reference to the offering of incense at the golden altar clearly indicates a daily (*tāmîḏ*), holy place intercessory ministry.[26]

Second Temple daily service. The daily (*tāmîḏ*) setting of Revelation 1–8 is further substantiated as these chapters are compared with the order of daily services in the second Temple of the century in which John wrote. Recent studies have set forth the striking parallels between the order of sanctuary allusions in Revelation 1–8 and the description of the daily (*tāmîḏ*) services described in the Mishnah.[27] We summarize as follows:

1. Trimming the lampstand (*m. Tāmîḏ* 3.9; cf. Rev 1:12–20)
2. Great door open (*m. Tāmîḏ* 3.7; cf. Rev 4:1)
3. Lamb slain (*m. Tāmîḏ* 3.7; 4:1–3, cf. Rev 5:6)
4. Blood poured out at base of bronze altar (*m. Tāmîḏ* 4.1; cf. Rev 6:9)
5. Incense offered at golden altar (*m. Tāmîḏ* 5.4; cf. Rev 8:3, 4)
6. Break in the singing (*m. Tāmîḏ* 7.3; Rev 8:1)
7. Trumpets blown to signal completion of sacrifice (*m. Tāmîḏ* 7.3; cf. 8:2–6)

Paulien concludes, "Not only does this portion of the Apocalypse contain all the major details of the *tāmîḏ* liturgy, it alludes to them in essentially the same order. Thus the material making up the septets of the churches, seals, and trumpets is subtly associated with the activities in the temple related to the continual or *tāmîḏ* service."[28]

Allusions to Second Apartment ministration. In contrast to the focus upon the daily service in the first part of the book, Revelation 11 shifts the emphasis to the annual liturgy of the Day of Atonement. This Yom Kippur motif is sustained throughout the latter portion of the book as far as chapter 20.[29]

Strand has shown how the measuring of the temple, altar, and worshipers (Rev 11:1) has its most complete thematic and sequential parallel in the description of the Day of Atonement rituals (Lev 16).[30] This comes immediately after the completion of Daniel's prophetic time in Revelation 10:5–6 (cf. Dan 12:7).[31]

The fourth sanctuary scene (Rev 11:19) explicitly portrays the opening of the "inner temple" (*naos*) or Most Holy Place and focuses upon the ark of the covenant. The immediate judgment context of this scene (cf. 11:18) supports the Day of Atonement setting, and also the larger context points in this direction.

Recent studies have demonstrated how the book of Revelation often follows the basic structure and detailed descriptions of Ezekiel,[32] and the Ezekiel pattern is decisive in Revelation 10–11. Ezekiel is given a scroll to eat (Ezek 2:9–3:3) and then is immediately called to give a message of an investigative judgment from the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary (3:4–8:18).[33] In a similar manner John is told to eat a scroll (Rev 10:8–11) and then is immediately given a message to measure the temple, altar, and worshipers (Rev 11:1–2), with a focus upon the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary (11:19).

The fifth sanctuary scene (15:5–8) marks the closing up or "de-inauguration" of the sanctuary. It is filled with smoke from the glory of God, and no one can enter: probation is closed. The seven last plagues follow, God's wrath unmingled with mercy (16:1–21).

The sixth sanctuary scene (19:1–10) describes sanctuary worship—praise to God for His just judgments—but there is no explicit mention of the sanctuary. The sanctuary's saving function has given way to doxology.

The final sanctuary scene (21:1–22:5) returns to earth. Now the tension between heavenly and earthly is collapsed: "the tabernacle *[skēnē]* of God is with men" (Rev 21:3, KJV).

Thus, the introductory sanctuary scenes structure the book of Revelation and provide the keys for determining the progression of the book. The spatiotemporal flow of the sanctuary scenes from earth to heaven and back to earth, and from daily to yearly ministrations to the cessation of all salvation functions, may be summarized as follows:

1:12–20	(1)	*Earth*—focus on earthly work of Christ (combined with holy place imagery)
4–5	(2)	*Inauguration* of heavenly sanctuary—(thorough mix of sanctuary imagery but holy place focus)
8:3–5	(3)	*Intercession* in heavenly sanctuary—(holy place)
11:19	(4)	*Judgment* in heavenly sanctuary—(Most Holy Place)
15:5–8	(5)	*Cessation* of heavenly sanctuary ministry
19:1–10	(6)	*Doxology* in heaven—(absence of explicit heavenly sanctuary imagery)
21:1–22:5	(7)	*Back to Earth*—"Tabernacle of God is with men."

In the historical half of Revelation, the introductory sanctuary scenes naturally flow from Christ's death and resurrection (Rev 1:5, 17, 18; cf. 5:6, 9, 12) to the inauguration of Christ's sanctuary ministry made possible by His death and resurrection (Rev 5), to His intercessory ministry following His inauguration (Rev 8:3, 4), and on to the work of end-time judgment (Rev 11:18, 19).

Linear flow/recapitulation sequences. This logical temporal progression of sanctuary scenes—cross, inauguration, intercession, judgment—does not, however, imply that the first half of Revelation proceeds chronologically verse-by-verse. Alongside the basic *linear plot* highlighted by the introductory sanctuary scenes, there is found the *recapitulation* schema similar to the visions of Daniel (Dan 2, 7, 8). A historical progression follows each introductory sanctuary scene and moves through the Christian Era to terminate in a spotlight on last events and a description of the glorious climax.[34] Thus the overall structure of Revelation is both linear and recapitulating, like a "conic spiral,"[35] or better, like a "music scale, that continually progresses in a linear direction while reviewing earlier tones in ever-richer vibrations."[36]

Thematic relations between sanctuary introductions and messages. The introductory sanctuary scenes not only structure the book of Revelation and demonstrate its spatiotemporal progression, but they also serve to enhance the message of the main sections they introduce.[37]

Before John is given the messages for the seven churches, he sees Christ dressed as a priest, walking among the seven lampstands (the seven churches, Rev 1:20). Christ, the antitypical high priest, is tending the sanctuary lamps. He is discharging His *tāmîḏ* (continual or daily) responsibility to keep the lamps burning brightly and continuously.

The symbolic details employed to describe the priestly Christ in Revelation 1:10–20 are highlighted in Revelation 2 and 3 as they are applied to each individual church's situation. Thereby an intimate connection between Heaven's priest and His messages to the seven churches is revealed. The connection means assurance and comfort: Christ is in the midst of the lampstands (1:12), walking among them (2:1). He knows their condition and cares. But there is also warning: Christ announces the covenant curses against the churches if they continue in disobedience.

Moving to the seven seals, Kenneth Strand has shown how these seals "represent the steps or means by which God through Christ prepares the way in history for the opening and reading of the great book of destiny at the judgment in the eschatological consummation."[38] Strand entitles this section, "God Works for Man's Salvation."[39] It is appropriately introduced in a heavenly sanctuary scene revealing God on His throne (Rev 4) with Christ in His presence truly qualified to break the seals and open the scroll (Rev 5).

Despite the trials and tribulation of God's people and the seeming divine delay in vindication of the persecuted and martyred (6:9, 10), yet, according to Revelation 4, God is in control! As in Psalm 2:4 and Habakkuk 2:20, God Lord Almighty, the Creator, sits serenely on His throne, the One who was, and is, and *about to come* to set things right. Furthermore, according to Revelation 5, "the title-deed, as it were, to man's lost inheritance … has been repurchased by Christ, the Lamb."[40] The Paschal Lamb has been slain and by His blood He has ransomed man for God. He is worthy, therefore, to take the scroll and break the seals: He will be present with and at work for His people during the time of their affliction.

The close thematic relationship between the introductory sanctuary scene and its message that follows is found also in the third major section of the book. In the introduction to the trumpet series (Rev 8:2–6) the angel-mediator mingles incense with the prayers of the saints upon the golden altar in the heavenly sanctuary, a portrayal of the "ongoing mediation of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary."[41]

According to Jon Paulien's analysis of this passage and its relationship to the fifth seal (Rev 6:9–11), the "prayers of the saints" refer particularly to the imprecatory prayers of the persecuted and martyred saints (received by the ministering angel from the earthly "altar of burnt offering," and then ministered in a heavenly context at the golden altar of the heavenly sanctuary).[42]

The incense (a symbol of Christ's merits) makes these prayers acceptable, and "the seven trumpets are God's response to the prayers of the saints for vengeance on those who have persecuted and martyred them."[43] In the heavenly sanctuary typology, the golden altar and incense, the sources of mediation in the earthly type, merge with a portrayal of judgment that fall upon the rejectors of the heavenly mediation. The censer is filled with fire and thrown to the earth, consonant with the depiction of divine executive judgment from the sanctuary in Ezekiel 10:1–6 and reminiscent of the experience of Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10:1–3).[44] As Paulien puts it, "The censer of prayer and the censer of judgment have become one."[45]

In the fourth section of Revelation, the introductory scene in Revelation 11:19 clearly points to the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary, and in particular to the heavenly ark of the covenant therein. Attention is thus drawn to the Law of God (contained in the ark) as the basis of judgment (the Day of Atonement) and to the mercy seat as the source of assurance in the judgment. These themes are then developed throughout the section. The announcement of end-time judgment is proclaimed (14:6, 7), and the marks of God's people are emphasized: the keeping of the commandments and the faith of Jesus (14:12; cf. 12:17).

With the fifth introductory sanctuary scene in Revelation 15, we have moved from the historical to the eschatological (postprobationary) half of the book. Thus the sanctuary scene is really twofold.

First, we find in verses 2–4 a picture of those who are conquerors in the struggle against the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing upon (*epi*) the heavenly sea of glass (part of the heavenly sanctuary scene in Revelation 4:6; the antitypical "molten sea"?)[46] singing the Song of Moses and the Lamb (a typological theme from the Exodus motif, Exod 15).

Second, in verses 5–8, the "temple of the tent of witness in heaven" is opened to release the seven plague angels and then closed. Just as the glory of the Lord filled the sanctuary/temple on earth at the close of Judah's probation and the commencement of the executive judgment upon her (Ezek 10:3–4),[47] so here in Revelation the smoke from God's glory, filling the temple so that none can enter, appears to signal the close of probationary time and the commencement of executive judgment upon the enemies of God.

These two sanctuary scenes in Revelation 15 are preludes to the final rewards for the saints and final punishments for the wicked; they are appropriately followed (in inverse order) by a focus upon punishment and reward in the remainder of the book.[48]

The sixth sanctuary scene (Rev 19:1–10) focuses upon heavenly praise for God's just judgments that are largely past and the marriage supper of the Lamb that is just ahead. While the doxology crescendos, explicit depictions of the heavenly temple are absent. The section that follows this scene is transitional. With Christ's salvation work complete the heavenly sanctuary as the center of the redemptive activity fades from view. The final phases of judgment (to be discussed below) are carried out, and the way is prepared for the earth-heaven tension in salvation history to be resolved.

In the seventh sanctuary scene (21:1–22:5), the New Jerusalem descends to earth, and the pronouncement is made, "Behold, the tabernacle [*skēnē*] of God is with men" (Rev 21:3, RSV). The ultimate purpose for which the earthly sanctuary was built on earth, "that I may dwell in their midst" (Exod 25:8), is now consummated: "He will dwell with them." (Rev 21:3). The ultimate theocentric/Christocentric focus of the heavenly sanctuary is highlighted as John writes, "And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb." (Rev 21:22).

The focus of activity in the city is now doxological[49]—all the redeemed gather about the throne in the city to worship Him, their ultimate Temple (22:3).[50]

Yearly Cycle of Festivals

Another major area of sanctuary typology appears to be embedded in the overall literary arrangement of Revelation. This is the typology of the Israelite cultic festivals (Lev 23).

Already in the OT there are hints that the yearly cultic calendar of Israel prefigures the sweep of salvation history. The author of Hebrews asserts this truth when he says that the sacrificial system was "*a shadow* of the good things *to come*" (Heb 10:1). There was a genuine reality to which each of these types pointed. The fact that the ceremonies needed to be repeated "year after year" revealed their own inadequacy and impermanence, but underscored the sufficiency and permanence of the coming realities.

Israel's major festivals. The Passover seems to be identified with commencement of Israel's salvation history: "This month shall be for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you" (Exod 12:2).

The Feast of Tabernacles, the last festival in the yearly cultic cycle, seems to be identified with the apocalyptic consummation of Israel's salvation history. God's original plan for the windup of the great controversy between good and evil was to be through the agency of literal, national Israel (had she remained faithful to God). In this context Zechariah describes how, following the final apocalyptic battle and the restoration of Jerusalem and the earth, the inhabitants of the earth would come year by year to the great eschatological feast *par excellence*, the Feast of Tabernacles (Zech 14:16).

Thus, the first and last feasts of Israel's cultic calendar seem tied to the inauguration and consummation of Israel's salvation history respectively.

It can be argued that the three major feasts of Israel prefigure the threefold substructure of NT salvation history.[51] God commanded Israel, "Three times in the year you shall keep a feast unto me" (Exod 23:14). These are identified as the Feast of Unleavened Bread (connected with Passover), the Feast of Harvest (Pentecost), and the Feast of Ingathering (Tabernacles), in verses 14–16. These are the only times of assembly in the cultic calendar actually called "feasts" (*ḥag*) in Scripture.

Correlative with the NT salvation history. The significance and timing of these three feasts correlates well with the dynamics of NT salvation history. The time of the first Passover and Unleavened Bread brought temporal redemption to Israel. They were "redeemed by the blood of the lamb" (cf. Exod 12:21–23). They were delivered from bondage, but they had not yet arrived in Canaan. Salvation history for them was *inaugurated*, but not yet consummated.

In the wilderness they were living in the tension between the "already" and the "not yet." It is in harmony with the biblical data, and held by Jewish tradition, that the giving of the law from Mt. Sinai took place at the time of the original Pentecost.[52] At this time the covenant with Israel was ratified. Thus, the nation was incorporated as God's covenant people. For 40 years the period of living "between the times" continued, and Israel *appropriated* the covenant blessings.

At last Israel reached Canaan, and her temporal redemption was *consummated*. The nation could now celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles, a glad reminder of divine protection during the period of wilderness wandering, and an occasion of rejoicing over the consummation of their temporal salvation history.

Seventh-day Adventists are generally familiar with how the NT finds the antitypical fulfillment of these three feasts (and the associated cultic "high days") in the eschatological salvation history brought about by Christ. Christ died at Passover time, as the antitypical passover Lamb (1 Cor 5:7), with unbroken bones (John 19:36; Exod 12:46). He arose on the third day as the antitypical wavesheaf, firstfruits of the future harvest (1 Cor 15:23; Lev 23:10–11). Fifty days later antitypical Pentecost is fully come. As in the original Pentecost at Mt. Sinai, there now comes fire, earthquake, and a blast of wind (Acts 2:1–3; cf. 4:31). As God had written His law on tables of stone with His own finger, He again writes the law with the finger of His Spirit (Luke 11:20; Matt 12:28), this time upon men's hearts (Jer 31; Heb 8; 10). And as Israel became God's special covenant people, so the New Israel becomes Christ's new covenant church.

The Spring feasts met this fulfillment at the commencement of NT salvation history. In like manner the fall high holy days (Trumpets and Day of Atonement) leading up to and including Tabernacles at the end of the cuitic calendar find fulfillment in connection with the apocalyptic consummation of NT salvation history. This is the special focus of the book of Revelation that lies at the heart of Adventist self-understanding as a prophetic/apocalyptic movement.

Festival typology. The overall structure of the book of Revelation may be seen to follow the sweep of salvation history as set forth in the OT festival typology. The general outline of Revelation appears to progress sequentially through the OT festivals. However, while an OT type finds basic fulfillment in one of the three aspects of salvation history (Christ, church, final climax), at the same time implications of the same type may be found in the other aspects of eschatological fulfillment. Such seems to be the case in sanctuary festival typology, as illustrated in chart 4 (see p. 130), and therefore each succeeding section of Revelation must not be expected to have exclusive reference to the corresponding festival.

1. Passover themes. In the introductory sanctuary scene of Revelation 1 there is a strong emphasis upon paschal themes. Only here in the book is there such a strong concentration upon Christ's death and resurrection.[53] Christ says to John, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades." (1:17–18). Earlier in the chapter grace is seen to come from Jesus Christ, "the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, ... who ... has freed us from our sins by his blood" (1:5).

Paulien notes that Christ's "scrutiny of the churches reminds one of the Jewish household's search for leaven just before Passover (cf. Exod 12:19; 13:7)."[54] M. D. Goulder points to "an ancient tradition for each church to have a paschal candle burning in worship from Easter to Pentecost,"[55] and suggests this as a background for the scene of seven lampstands for the seven churches. Goulder also provides intriguing evidence that other major motifs in Revelation 1 are intimately tied to Passover.[56] And the *earthly* setting comports with Passover, the only festival with its primary fulfillment in the *earthly* Christ.

2. Pentecost themes. The introductory sanctuary scene of Revelation 4–5 appears most likely to portray the inauguration ceremony of the Lamb in the heavenly temple,[57] an event that took place during the ten days following Christ's ascension, reaching its climax on the day of Pentecost.[58] If this interpretation is correct, then the second major section of Revelation may be regarded as intimately connected with the antitypical Pentecost. At the time of John's vision both the antitypical Passover and Pentecost were past events with ongoing consequences. In the heavenly liturgy Jesus, the Lion/Lamb, is declared worthy to open the seals, to commence His heavenly salvation work preparatory to opening the book of destiny at the final judgment.

It is not without significance that the traditional Jewish lectionary readings for Pentecost are Exodus 19:1–20:23 and Ezekiel 1.[59] That the throne vision of Revelation 4 is drawn largely from Ezekiel 1 is unmistakable with their similar portrayals of the throne, the rainbow, and the four living creatures. Several details also appear to allude to Exodus 19: Note especially the voices and the lightnings (Rev 4:5; cf. Exod 19:16), the voice of the trumpet (Rev 4:1; cf. Exod 19:16–19), and the summons to "come up" (Rev 4:1; cf. Exod 19:24).

The connection with Exodus 19 is not surprising since, as we have already noted, the giving of the Torah (Law) on Mt. Sinai probably coincided with the first Pentecost. If modeled after the Sinai experience, Revelation 5 may be seen in a sense to present Christ as the antitypical Moses, receiving the new Torah from God. At the first Pentecost Moses offered the bloody sacrifice to ratify the Sinaitic covenant of redemption (Exod 24:8; cf. Exod 20:2; Deut 9:11), and Israel was inaugurated as a "kingdom of priests" (Exod 19:6). In like manner the slain Lamb, by His "blood of the covenant" (Matt 26:28 = Exod 24:8), redeemed men for God (Rev 5:6, 9) and inaugurated them as a "kingdom and priests to God" (Rev 5:10).

3. Trumpet themes. In the third major section of Revelation the seven trumpets recall the seven monthly new moon festivals which form a transition between spring and fall feasts and climax in the "Feast" of Trumpets (Num 10:2, 10; 29:1). Just as the Feast of Trumpets (also called Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year), summoned ancient Israel to prepare for the coming day of judgment, Yom Kippur, so the trumpets of Revelation especially highlight the approach of the antitypical Yom Kippur.

While the seals view the sweep of history from the perspective of Christ's inauguration and forward, the trumpets seem to reach backward in salvation history as tokens throughout the Christian Era that God will "remember" (that is, act on behalf of) His people and as warnings to prepare for the antitypical day of atonement.[60] The trumpet-calls to repentance come through successive warning judgments and reach their climax in the interlude after the sixth trumpet (Rev 10–11). It is in keeping with the Feast of Trumpets imagery that the spotlight on last events (in this interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpets) details the time of the Great Disappointment and the beginning of the investigative judgment in 1844.[61]

The seventh trumpet brings to consummation the historical sweep of this section of Revelation with a description of the glorious climax: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever." (Rev 11:15). Then the response of the twenty-four elders (11:18) summarizes in advance the flow of the remainder of the book: the nations rage, divine wrath, judgment of the dead, reward of the saints, destruction of the wicked.[62]

4. Day of Atonement themes. The introductory sanctuary scene to the fourth major section of Revelation (Rev 11:19) ushers us into the Most Holy Place for the commencement of the antitypical holiest day of the cultic year, the day of atonement (Yom Kippur). The seven great controversy scenes that follow highlight the announcement that "the hour of his judgment has come." (14:7).

The typical Yom Kippur included not only (1) the work of investigative judgment, final atonement, and the cleansing of the sanctuary (Lev 16), but also (2) retributive/executive judgment upon unrepentant sinners in the camp (Lev 23:29–30), and (3) the rite of elimination by means of Azazel's goat being sent away into the wilderness (Lev 16:10, 20–22).

Likewise, in the antitype, the day of atonement in Revelation carries us through the investigative judgment (11:1, 2, 19; 14:7); through the seven last plagues (chaps. 15–16), and the judgment of Babylon (17:1–19:4); and on through the millennial consignment of Satan to the "wilderness"/bottomless pit and the concurrent review judgment by the saints (20:1–10) to the climatic white throne judgment and the final elimination of sin in the second death (20:11–15). The day of atonement thus encompasses the investigative, review, and executive phases of final judgment.[63]

5. Feast of Tabernacle themes. In Revelation 21 the antitypical day of atonement (Yom Kippur) is over, the "camp is clean," and the antitypical Feast of Tabernacles can commence. It is amazing to note how much of the final section of Revelation (and the spotlights on the final rewards of the redeemed in earlier sections) is couched in the imagery of tabernacles.

The Feast of Tabernacles was also called the Feast of Ingathering, coming after the harvest had been gathered into the garner. Likewise the antitypical feast follows the harvest of the earth (Rev 14:14–20) and constitutes the final ingathering of God's people into their harvest home. Israel of old came to Jerusalem at the "revolution [*t^{e}qûpah*] of the year" (Exod 34:22) to celebrate the feast for seven days (plus an eighth, Lev 23:33–37). In the antitype, apocalyptic Israel enters the New Jerusalem at the revolution of the ages (" 'the former things have passed away.' ... 'Behold, I make all things new' " [Rev 21:4, 5]) to celebrate and "worship for ever and ever!" (7:9–17; 22:3–5).

In the historical OT feast the Israelites dwelt in "tabernacles" (*sukkôṯ*) from whence the feast derived its name. In the antitypical finale, "the tabernacle [*skēnē*, as in Lev 23:42 LXX] of God is with men, and he will dwell [*skēnoō*] with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them" (Rev 21:3, KJV). Ancient Israel was commanded to "rejoice before the Lord" (Lev 23:40) at the feast. In actual practice this meant the waving of palm branches, singing, the playing of instruments of music and a great feast.[64] In the apocalyptic fulfillment there is again the waving of palm branches (Rev 7:9), glorious anthems of praise (7:10; 14:3; 15:2–4), harpers playing on their harps (14:2), and the great marriage supper of the Lamb (19:9).

During the typical feast the worshipers were to remember their time of wilderness wandering (Lev 23:43). In practice this developed into two impressive ceremonies: (1) "the water of outpouring," symbolizing the water from the rock that had sustained Israel in the barren wilderness; and (2) the "ceremony of lights," commemorating the pillar of fire that had guided them through the desert.[65] Both of these ceremonies by the first century A.D. had been recognized for their Messianic import. Jesus clearly pointed toward their Christological fulfillment in Himself as the light of the world and the water of life (John 7:37; 8:12).[66]

In the final, glorious, apocalyptic fulfillment of the feast, the water festival is there. Not just a goblet from the pool of Siloam, nor even water gushing from a rock, but a "river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Rev 22:1). And the light ceremony is there. Not lampstands in the court of the women, nor even a pillar of fire, nor even the dazzling sun, but the "glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb" (21:23). Jesus' final appeal in the book seems to continue the tabernacles imagery: "Let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life [the water of the ultimate Tabernacles] without price" (22:17).

Conclusion

As we conclude this survey of sanctuary typology, we should note some additional related typological imagery not referred to in the general discussion of the sanctuary motif within the overall structure of Revelation. Some of these allusions are explicit; other references are more elusive. The "hidden manna" (2:17) certainly belongs to the Exodus motif, but it may also refer to the manna "hidden" inside the ark in the Most Holy Place (cf. Exod 16:32–34; Heb 9:4). The promise to the overcomers in Sardis that they would be clothed in white garments (3:4), may sumbolize more than purity/righteousness. The symbol may also point to their role as antitypical priests with Christ (such a role is made explicit in 1:6; 5:10). The several references to the twenty-four elders (4:4, etc.) may allude back to the Levitical priesthood and its twenty-four courses of Levitical priests (1 Chr 24:1–19).

The four living creatures, mentioned repeatedly throughout Revelation (4:6–9, etc.) are almost identical with the beings in Ezekiel 1 and 10. In the latter passage they are identified as "cherubim." These beings may be regarded as the antitypical correspondents to the cherubim over the ark in the earthly sanctuary.[67]

Finally, in a similar vein, the numerous allusions to the Psalms and other OT hymnic passages in the heavenly liturgy of praise may be seen in antitypical relationship to the earthly liturgical psalms in ancient Israel's sanctuary.[68]

It is not an overstatement to conclude that the final book of the NT gathers all the major threads of OT sanctuary typology and weaves them into an intricate and beautiful tapestry to form the backdrop for the entire book. In the process, the prophet reveals the centrality and cruciality of the sanctuary motif for unlocking the structure, message, and meaning of the Apocalypse.

Chart 1

Biblical Typology: An Overview of Issues

I. Significance of NT Typological Interpretation of the OT

A. Modern Assessments:

1. Leonard Goppelt: Typology "is the central and distinctive New Testament way of understanding Scripture."
2. G. Ernest Wright: "The one word which perhaps better than any other describes the early Church's method of interpreting the OT is 'typology.' "
3. Robert M. Grant: "The NT method of interpreting the Old was generally that of typology."
4. E. Earle Ellis (quoting W. G. Kummel): "Typological interpretation expresses most clearly 'the basic attitude of primitive Christianity toward the OT.' "

B. Critique: The above assertions may overstate the case, but certainly typology provides an important case study into NT hermeneutics.

II. Two Modern Views of Biblical Typology: Traditional and "Postcritical"

A. Traditional: Typology is the study of divinely designed prefigurations (in the form of persons/events/institutions) that point forward to their antitypical fulfillment in Christ and gospel realities brought about by Christ.
B. "Postcritical Neotypology": Typology is the study of historical correspondences between OT and NT persons, events, and institutions, retrospectively recognized within the consistent revelation of God in history.
C. Major elements of difference:

Traditional	Historical-Critical
1. Rooted in historical realities (historicity essential).	1. Historicity not essential.
2. Divinely-designed prefigurations.	2. Analogies/correspondences within God's similar modes of activity.
3. Prospective/predictive.	3. Retrospective (little or no predictive element).
4. Prefigurations extend to specific details.	4. Involves only general "parallel situations."
5. Includes vertical (sanctuary) typology.	5. Rejects vertical as alien to biblical perspective (Hebrews = mythic/dualistic).
6. Involves consistent principles of interpretation.	6. No system or order—freedom of Spirit.

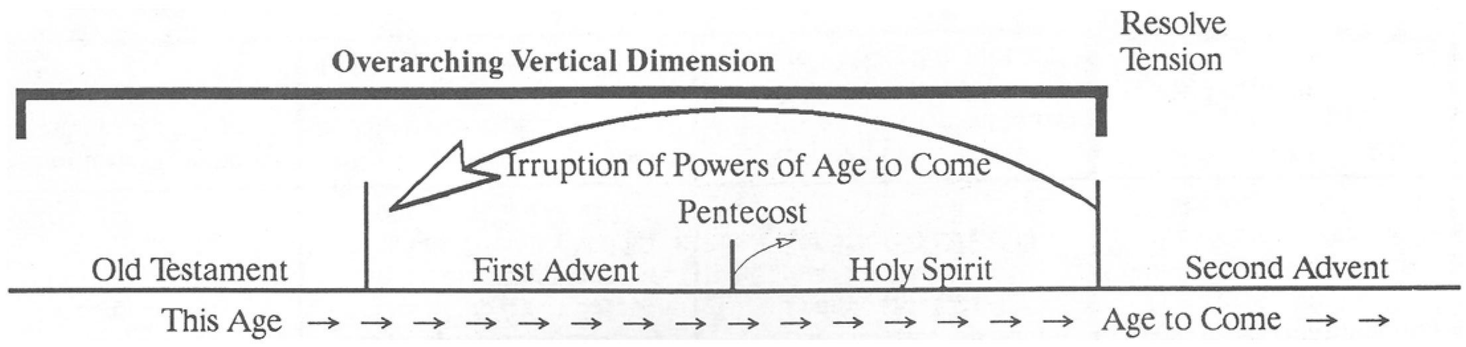
Chart 2

Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament: Identifying The Types

Old Testament Type (Person/Event/Institution)	Old Testament Verbal Indicator of Typology	New Testament Announcement of Antitype
1. Exodus: Book of Exodus; Hos 11:1; etc.	**New Exodus**[1] Hos 2:14–15; 12:9, 13; 13:4–5; Jer 23:4–8; 16:14–15; 31:32; Isa 11:15–16; 35; 40:3–5; 41:17–20; 42:14–16; 43:1–3, 14–21; 48:20–21; 49:8–12; 51:9–11; 52:3–6, 11–12; 55:12–13	**Antitypical Exodus**[2] Matt 1–5; Luke 9:31; etc.
2. Sanctuary Exod 25–40	**Heavenly Original**[3] Exod 25:40; Ps 11:4; 18:6; 60:6; 63:2; 68:35; 96:6; 102:19; 150:1; Isa 6; Jonah 2:7; Mic 1:2; Hab 2:20; etc.	**Heavenly Original** Heb 8:5; 9:24; Rev 8:1–5; 11:19; 16:1; etc.
3. Jonah The Book of Jonah	**New Jonah** Hos 6:1–3 (= Israel); Isa 41–53 (Messiah represents and recapitulates experience of Israel: Isa 41:8; 42:1; 44:1; 49:3–6; 52:13–53:11; etc.)	**Antitypical Jonah** Matt 12:40; etc.
4. Elijah 1 Kgs 17–19	**New Elijah** Mal 4:5, 6	**Antitypical Elijah** Matt 11:14; Mark 9:11; Luke 1:17
5. Moses Pentateuch	**New Moses** Deut 18:15–19	**Antitypical Moses** John 1:21; 6:14; 8:40; etc.

Chart 3

Fourfold Eschatological Substructure of Typology



	OLD TESTAMENT	CHRIST'S FIRST ADVENT*	THE CHURCH	CHRIST'S SECOND ADVENT**
In Kingdom Language	Theocratic Kingdom (Direct Rule by God or His Earthly Vicegerent)	Kingdom of Grace (Matt 12:28; Heb 4:16)	Tension Between "Already" and "Not Yet" (Matt 16:19)	Kingdom of Glory (Matt 25:31)
In Eschatological Language	Verbal Predictions of End-time	Inaugurated Eschatology	Appropriated Eschatology	Consummated Eschatology
TYPOLOGY				
	Old Testament Types	**New Testament Antitypes**		
Typological Fulfillment Aspects	Persons, Events, Institutions	Christ (Christological)	Church (Ecclesiological)	Final Climax (Apocalyptic)
Fulfillment Mode	National, Ethnic	Literal, Local Fulfillment	Spiritual, Universal, Partial Fulfillment	Glorious, Final Literal Fulfillment
Examples (1)	**Israel**	**New Israel** (Matt 2:15)	**Israel of God** (Gal 6:16)	**Apocalyptic Israel** (Rev 7:4)
(2)	Exodus	Christ's Exodus (Matt 1–5; Luke 9:31)	Spiritual Exodus (Heb 4; 2 Cor 6:17)	Apocalyptic Exodus (Rev 15:1–3)
(3)	**Sanctuary/Temple**	**Christ as Temple** (John 1:14; 2:21; Matt 12:6)	**Church as Temple** (1 Cor 3:16, 17; 2 Cor 6:16)	**Heavenly Temple/Ultimate Temple** (Rev 3:12; 7:15: 11:19; 21:3, 22)

Chart 4

Festivals Of Leviticus 23: Typological Aspects in the New Testament

A. SPRING:**	***	OT FESTIVAL	CHRISTOLOGICAL*	ECCLESIOLOGICAL*	APOCALYPTIC*
1 (NISAN) 14	1	Passover (Pesach) (Lev 23:4, 5; Exod 12:1–14)	Crucifixion (Matt 26:27–28; 27:46; John 19:31–37)	Lord's Supper (1 Cor 5:7; 11:23–26)	Feast of The Lamb (Luke 22:15–16; Matt 26:29; Rev 19:7–9; 15:1–3)
1 (NISAN) 15–21		Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev 23:5–8; Exod 12:8–20)	Provision for Removal of Sin (1 Cor 5:6–8)	Removal of Sin (1 Cor 5:6–8)	Removal of Sin (1 Cor 15:22, 53; Rev 14:4–5)
1 (NISAN) 16		First Fruits (Lev 23:9–14)	Resurrection (1 Cor 15:23)	First Fruits of Spirit (Rom 8:23)	144,000 as First Fruits (Rev 14:4)
3 (SIVAN) 6	2	Pentecost (Shavuot) (Lev 23:15–22)	Anointing With the Spirit (Matt 3:16, 17; Acts 10:38)	"Early Rain" (Joel 2:23; Acts 2)	"Latter Rain" (Joel 2:23; Rev 18:1)
B. FALL: 7 (TISHRI) 1		Trumpets (Rosh Hashana) (Lev 23:23–25)	Call to Judgment (John 12:31)	Call to Judgment (Rev 8 & 9; 1 Pet 4:17)	Call to Judgment (Rev 14:6, 7; Joel 2:1)
7 (TISHRI) 10		Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) (Lev 16; 23:26–31)	Lord's Goat (Heb 9:25, 26; DA 24, 757; AA 33); Christ Comes Suddenly to Cleanse His Temple (Mal 3:1–3; John 2:13–22; DA 161)	Christ Cleanses the Soul Temple (Mal 3:1–3; 2 Cor 6:16–17; 1 Cor 3:16–17; DA 161)	1844 to Close of Millennium (Dan 8:14; Rev 11:19; 14:6–8; 20) Christ Cleanses the Heavenly Temple (Mal 3:1–3; GC 424–426)
7 (TISHRI) 15–22	3	Tabernacles (Sukkoth) (Lev 23:33–36)	Christ "Tabernacles" (John 1:14); Antitypical Water Ceremony (John 7:37) and Light Ceremony (John 8:12a)	Keep the Feast Today pp. 540–541, Antitypical Water (John 7:38) and Light (Matt 5:14–16; John 8:12b)	New Earth (Zech 14:16; Rev 7:9–12; 14:1–5; 19:6–10; 21–22)

Chapter VI

Relationships Between Daniel and Revelation

Richard Lehmann

Editorial Synopsis. As historicist interpreters, Adventists have always recognized the close bond between Daniel and Revelation. Some subjects, first presented in Daniel, are repeated and elaborated upon in Revelation inasmuch as both cover the sweep of the Christian Era.

In 1902 Ellen White wrote, "It was my idea to have the two books bound together, Revelation following Daniel, as giving fuller light on the subjects dealt with in Daniel. The object is to bring these books together, showing that they both relate to the same subjects" (*Testimonies to Ministers* [Mountain View, CA, 1962], 117).

Since modern liberal scholarship denies the possibility of prophecy and restricts Daniel and its message to a second century B.C. Palestine setting, the present author suggests that today's church needs further reasons to justify its study of Daniel and Revelation together.

In addition to the ties of common literary genre (apocalyptic) and common subject matter, he suggests another line of evidence: NT references to Daniel 2, 7, and 9. The NT writers were not "futurists" in the modern religious sense of the term. Rather, they recognized that the eschatological parts of Daniel *had not yet been fulfilled* —in their time or prior to their time but were destined for fulfillment at some point *future* to them. Consequently, it is legitimate to link Daniel with Revelation at their points of common concern in the Christian Era.

From a wider perspective the author suggests that common ethical concerns, chronological time periods, as well as the emphasis on the Messianic Son of man in Daniel and Revelation so complement and supplement each other that the two prophecies must be studied together.

Chapter Outline

I. Introduction
II. New Testament Use of Daniel
III. Revelation's Allusions to Daniel
IV. Why Study Daniel and Revelation?

Introduction

It is traditional procedure among Seventh-day Adventists to analyze the books of Daniel and Revelation according to their mutual relationships.[1] For example, it should be evident to any reader that the animals of Daniel 7 are to be found again in the sea beast of Revelation 13, that the millennial and executive phases of final judgment in Revelation 20 are not without connection with the description of the preadvent judgment in Daniel 7, and that the sojourn of the woman in the wilderness in Revelation 12:6, 14 is identical with that of the persecution of the saints mentioned in Daniel 7:25.

But not all researchers see the linkage in the same way. Certain theologians prefer to see Isaiah and Ezekiel as the backdrop to Revelation.[2] It becomes necessary, therefore, today—much more than in the past—to justify our choice and our reading of the book of Revelation in connection with the book of Daniel. What reasons can we advance for aligning Revelation especially with the book of Daniel?

If we see a related link between the two prophecies, it is essentially because we find in them the same description, both recurring and continuous, of the history of the world and of the church. We believe these books deal with our world's history and set its main stages in connection with the story of redemption.

Historical-critical scholarship regards the book of Daniel as restricted to second century B.C. Judaism. Only a few verses are accepted as prophetic in nature. Consequently, it is necessary to establish from the Scriptures whether Daniel had an apocalyptic message reaching beyond that era. We may legitimately ask the NT writers if Daniel touches on end-of-time events and whether they saw the fulfillment of its prophecies as taking place at points future to their day.

If we can answer these questions in the affirmative, we then have the right to link Daniel and Revelation on the basis of a common interpretation. Moreover, if we can establish that Daniel's prophecies were perceived in NT times to have precise historical applications, then we will be able to interpret the two books as dealing with the continuous history of this world in relation to the plan of salvation.

New Testament Use of Daniel

The Striking Stone

The prophecy of Daniel 2 is a narration of a succession of political powers extending from Daniel's day to the end of time (Dan 2:36–45). Did the NT authors view this prophecy already fulfilled? It is true that the Gospels refer only to the last part of it—the stone that strikes the metallic image upon its feet. But it is of interest to see whether they perceived the destructive action of the stone as a past or a future event.

Two references are made to the prophecy of Daniel 2. In Luke 20:18 and Matthew 21:44 reference is made to a stone. "Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder" (Matt 21:44, KJV). The reading of these two texts could suggest that they are alluding to Psalm 118:22–23 rather than to Daniel 2 since the former passage deals with the stone, rejected by the builders, that became the cornerstone of the Temple. However, for several reasons we believe that in this case Jesus combines both references (Ps 118 and Dan 2) in His statement.

Both Gospel texts seem to recall the twofold action stated in Daniel 2:34–35. The stone, it was said, *breaks* the kingdoms into pieces and scatters them like "the chaff of the summer threshing floors." In other words, the stone *breaks* and *threshes*. In the Gospels persons *are broken* who fall on the stone or are *crushed* if the stone falls on them.

In addition, Matthew and Luke use the same Greek verb as the LXX (Theod.) in Daniel 2:44 for "crushing" or "threshing." "To thresh" (Greek, *likmaō*), occurs in the LXX (Theod.) only in Daniel 2:44 and Ruth 3:2.

It seems evident that when Matthew and Luke state that he who falls upon the stone will be *broken* and he upon whom the stone falls will be *threshed*—the same verbal order as in Daniel—they have Daniel 2 in mind.

It is worth knowing how Jesus and the Gospel writers understood this stone reference in Daniel. Did they look at the events of the first century as a fulfillment of the prophecy? Some think they did; I do not.

Luke 20:18. Let us analyze the immediate context of the reference taken from Luke 20. It follows the parable of the wicked husbandmen (Luke 20:9–16) and foretells Israel's judgment. When the harvesttime approaches, the owner wishes to receive the fruit of his vineyard. But the wickedness of the husbandmen compels him to exercise judgment on them and to let out the vineyard to a new team.

His listeners mentally refuse such an outcome. How could God choose another nation? So Jesus—speaking to the silent question—asks them, "What is this then that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner?" (vs. 17, KJV). Then He brings up the reference to Daniel 2 (vs. 18).

A superficial reading might lead the reader to think that Jesus sees His rejection by the Jews as the fulfillment by Israel of the prophecy of Daniel 2. A closer reading shows that this is not the case.

The *eschatological future* of verse 18 should be noted (shall fall/shall be broken; shall fall/will grind to powder). The effects of the stone are projected toward an undetermined future.

Furthermore, if the designation, "builders," points to Israel's leaders or to the nation itself, the "whosoever" of verse 18 suggests a *universal application*. The judgment to fall upon Israel in A.D. 70 is but a historical example pointing to what will happen to "whosoever" rejects the Messiah.

This interpretation is confirmed by Matthew's passage, which is more elaborate than Luke's.

Matthew 21:44. This verse has not been retained by all exegetes. I believe, however, along with *The SDA Bible Commentary*, that it can be maintained. The verse appears in important manuscripts; and its omission in others can be explained as a copyist's error due to the similar ending word in verses 43 and 44 (*autēs/auton*) in the Greek text. Furthermore, verse 44 fits perfectly into the line of reasoning in the context.

The Gospel of Matthew is strongly church oriented. Beda Rigaux says that to enter into Matthew's Gospel is like entering a cathedral. It is not surprising that Matthew is more detailed and precise here than is Luke. Hence he records Jesus's statement, "The kingdom of God shall be ... given to a nation *bringing forth the fruits thereof*" (vs. 43). Furthermore, Jesus does not make His reference to Daniel 2 after the Psalm 118 citation but immediately after His noting the coming of another "nation."

We have, therefore, in successive order: verse 42 and Psalm 118; verse 43 and the transfer of the kingdom; verse 44 and Daniel 2. The reference to the church (kingdom of God) is set between the two references to a stone. Verse 42 is linked to verse 43 by means of a conjunction—"therefore" (*dia touto*)—which shows that if Jesus is the cornerstone, He is the cornerstone of the church.

Verse 44 is linked to verse 43 by means of the demonstrative pronoun of closeness (*houtos*, "this") instead of the demonstrative pronoun of distance (*ekeinos*, "that") found in Luke. Had Matthew wanted to skip the reference to the church (vs. 43) in order to link verse 44 to 42 (the two stone statements), he would have simply used Luke's "that [*ekeinos*] stone." This line of thought means that the church is built upon Jesus Christ (vs. 42), and that it partakes in His victory (vs. 43). The attitude of the Jews toward the church is similar to the one they have toward Christ.

Does this mean then that the church is the kingdom foretold in Daniel's prophecy? Not at all. For three reasons the stone is not to be identified with the church at Christ's first advent. First, there is the future tense of verse 44 as we observed earlier ("whosoever *shall* fall on this stone shall be broken," etc.). Only the final judgment will reveal and demonstrate the victory of the church.

Second, there is the distinction that Jesus makes in the parable between the first and the second coming of the householder. When he sends his son, the time of the harvest is not yet come. As Matthew said, it is only drawing "near" (vs. 34). But when the householder comes to execute justice on his wicked husbandmen (vs. 40), it is also with a view of receiving the fruits in their time. So, according to the parable, there is only one time of harvest; when Jesus was on earth this time was only "approaching."

An additional reason lies in the fact that Matthew gives a detail (vs. 41) that does not appear in Luke: the new husbandmen will "render him the fruits in their seasons," that is, at harvesttime. It is not until *then* that their faithfulness will be demonstrated. This unwitting allusion to the church by the Pharisees can be explained in terms of the parable and the record by the Semitic method of inclusion. This method consists of repeating at the end of a story (vs. 41) the theme of the beginning (vs. 34) in order to give the account coherence.[3] The proper function of the new husbandmen recalls the point of the story, its main object. At the time of the harvest the Lord will come to receive the fruit. There is therefore a time *in the future* when the Lord will come to His vineyard; at that time He will be received by His own.

The prophecy of Daniel 2 concerns *the end of time*. The stone (kingdom) that would "thresh" (grind) the nations, according to Christ's words, was future to His day and pertains to the victorious establishment of the eternal kingdom of God. This finds confirmation also in the fact that the church of genuine believers is not fully manifested until "the time of the harvest," "when he [Christ] shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe ... in that day" (2 Thess 1:10, KJV).

The Son of Man; Abomination of Desolation

After Daniel 2, it is not surprising to see the NT give even more attention to Daniel 7. C. H. Dodd thinks this OT chapter "belongs to the very foundations of New Testament thought."[4] This chapter served as a point of reference for Jesus as well as for the apostles. The most obvious reference (although not directly quoted) is Daniel 7:13—the prophecy of the Son of man coming in the clouds.

Again, according to Dodd, "obviously we have to deal with one of those passages which from the beginning guided in a decisive fashion the thought and the vocabulary of the church concerning that which had to do with one of the essential points of the Kerygma, the return of Christ as judge and Saviour of humanity."[5]

The Son of man in the clouds is mentioned by Jesus in His eschatological discourse. "And then shall they see," He said, "*the Son of man coming in the clouds* with great power and glory" (Mark 13:26, KJV). Before the Sanhedrin, He included with the Daniel allusion a reference to Psalm 110:1. "Ye shall see *the Son of man* sitting on the right hand of power, and *coming in the clouds of heaven*" (Mark 14:62, KJV). An implicit reference to Daniel 7 is presented in the words of the angels to the apostles at the ascension of Jesus when *a cloud* received him out of their sight: "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, *shall so come in like manner*" (Acts 1:11, KJV). The apostle Paul drew an obvious conclusion from it: At the return of Christ the redeemed will be caught up "*in the clouds, to meet the Lord* in the air" (1 Thess 4:17, KJV).

It is possible that when Paul asserts that the saints will judge the world (1 Cor 6:2), he is thinking of Daniel 7:22 where it says that "judgment was given to the saints" (KJV) and they possess the kingdom (see also Rev 20:4). Daniel 7:18 also declares that the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom. This allusion to the reign of the saints is reflected in 2 Timothy 2:12. Finally Jesus asserts that it is He who appoints the kingdom unto the saints so that they may reign with Him (Luke 22:29, 30; cf. Rev 5:9–10). The thoughts of Daniel 7:18, 22 are combined in a single statement by Jesus in Matthew 19:28—"In the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (KJV). *Let us note that these predictions do not refer to an event in the past but are oriented toward the future .*

Let us observe that *these Daniel references in Adventist interpretation have a future eschatological character. It is the same in the use made of them by the NT*. And these are not the only ones. Others could be added. For example, Daniel 12:2/Matthew 25:46; Daniel 12:3/Matthew 13:43.

Let us conclude this part of our study by examining the explicit reference by Jesus to the "abomination of desolation" (Matt 24:15, KJV). The Jews were familiar with the book of Daniel. They apparently saw in the sacrilege perpetrated by Antiochus Epiphanes the fulfillment of one of its prophecies (1 Macc 1:54; 6:7). How could it have been otherwise for an afflicted people who attempted to understand contemporary events in the light of prophecy? All that they still waited for was "the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate" (Dan 9:27, KJV) and the Messiah's appearance. The advent of the Messiah and the end of the world were one and the same event in their estimation (Matt 24:3).

What is striking about Jesus' reference to "the abomination of desolation, *spoken by Daniel* the prophet" is that He *corrects the interpretation* that the Jews gave of it. For Him "the abomination of desolation" *had not yet arrived*! *Jesus projected into the future beyond His time what Jewish thought considered to have taken place*. Assuredly, it is Judea, and more precisely Jerusalem, says Luke, which sees the beginning of these events, but they will extend universally, for the righteous have to be gathered from the four winds, the utmost parts of the earth, up to the eternity of heaven (Mark 13:27).

We may conclude this section by observing that as far as we have surveyed Daniel's prophecies interpreted in the NT, none is seen as having had an application in the past or the present by the writers of the NT. Each time the material is interpreted eschatologically, it is part of the prophecies of Daniel that deal with the end of time. Therefore, we have every reason to think that the book of Daniel is seen by the writers of the NT as a book whose fulfillment is expected in the future beyond them, that is, at the end of the age.

Does this mean that the NT writers are adopting a futuristic method of interpretation? No, because as we have seen, they are quoting those portions of the prophecies of Daniel 2 and 7 that are themselves dealing with the end of time. References to the text of Daniel 9 will show us that the primitive church read the prophecies of Daniel in a chronological and continuous framework. For Jesus and the authors of the NT, the book of Daniel (specifically chapters 2 and 7) is not to be interpreted in a preteristic sense. In these great outline scenes we are dealing much more with the time to come.

Jesus, the Anointed One of Daniel 9

The prophecy of the 70 weeks (Dan 9) has been the subject of considerable study. Our question is, Did the early church see the prophecy of the 70 weeks as we do? That is, did it see in Jesus the fulfillment of this prophecy? Did they regard it as having a chronological character? We have reason to say yes to these inquiries.

Unanimously, historians affirm that in the first century of our era the Messianic expectation in Israel was in ferment. We have some evidences of this in the NT. For example, the apostle Paul justifies his appeal to Caesar before the chief of the Jews at Rome because of "the hope of Israel" (Acts 28:20). This hope could only be that of the Messiah (1 Tim 1:1). Luke notes that when John the Baptist appeared, "the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not" (Luke 3:15, KJV). For Paul, the matter is clear. "In due time," he says "Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom 5:6, KJV).

Jesus Himself appears to be aware of the time element of this prophecy foretelling the appearance and death of the Messiah (Dan 9:25–26; cf. Mark 1:15). The evangelist John, who gives great attention to the question of chronology, underlines this emphasis when he records Jesus' repeated observation that His hour was not yet come (John 7:6, 8; 2:4; 7:30). In the upper room, just before he was arrested, Jesus prayed, "Father, the hour is come" (John 17:1, KJV).

In this context we must understand the apostle Paul's words, "when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son" (Gal 4:4, KJV). And when he states precisely that Jesus was "made of a woman, made under the law," it is because he thinks of the coming of Jesus as situated in history.

It is feasible, therefore, to assume that the primitive church recognized Jesus to be the *Christ*, that is to say, the Anointed One, because it saw His timed appearance and execution as a fulfillment of Daniel 9. An important statement by Jesus indicates quite well that He considered Himself the Anointed One foretold by the prophecy. He said in Matthew 26:28, "this is my blood of the *new testament [covenant]*, which is *shed for many*" (KJV). Philip Mauro makes the remark that Christ's words could not be in more perfect agreement with those of the prophecy: "And he shall confirm the covenant with many."[6]

So the NT confirms that the prophecy of the 70 weeks concerning the Anointed One finds its fulfillment in the person of Jesus. His coming and His death were dependent upon a program known and announced long ago by the prophecy.

We may add that the relationship between the books of Daniel and Revelation is also in this area of Messianic prophecy. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has good reasons to be interested in both prophetic books. As apocalyptic prophecies, they present history in its unfolding by associating it with Heaven's central focus—the Person and the work of Jesus Christ.

Revelation's Allusions to Daniel

What place does the book of Daniel occupy in Revelation? If these two books have a close relationship, we ought to find some aspects of the book of Daniel linked to Revelation. H. B. Swete has made an analysis of the vocabulary of Revelation. Although his work is quite old (the date of the second edition which I have consulted is 1907)[7] it will be useful to us for our purpose.

While certain Bible books are used more than others in Revelation, there is a total absence of formal quotations. More than half of the references are drawn from the Psalms, the prophecies of Isaiah and Ezekiel, and the book of Daniel. But according to Swete, proportional to its length, the book of Daniel is by far the most used.[8] According to P.-M. Bogaert, "Implicit or explicit, the reference to Daniel constitutes one of the most certain characteristics of literature of apocalyptic origin."[9] It would be tedious to give all the references, for there are more than 30. But let us note several.

First, imagery from Daniel 2. This prophecy of Daniel concerns, "what shall come to pass hereafter" (Dan 2:45, KJV). John uses this vocabulary in some nondescriptive sections to specify that his visions concern "things which must shortly come to pass" (1:1; 22:6, KJV) or "hereafter" (4:1). According to Daniel 2:28, the prophet declared that the God who revealed *secrets* had made known to the king *what should come to pass* hereafter. Now according to John, it is Jesus Himself who asks him to write the things *which shall be hereafter*, the *mystery* of the seven stars (Rev 1:20).

These allusions to Daniel 2 provide more than linguistic imagery. They are written in the series of events that succeed each other. The use of the vocabulary of Daniel is not done by chance. For example, the vision of Daniel (chap. 2) closes with the judgment of God symbolized by a stone that smashes the image and scatters its pieces to such an extent that "the wind carried them away, that *no place was found for them*" (Dan 2:35, KJV). In like manner the vision given to John about the present world finishes with the final judgment scene of "a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and *there was found no place for them*" (Rev 20:11, KJV). *There is a clear correspondence between the end of the vision of Daniel and the end of the present world according to John .*

The chapter of Daniel most cited in Revelation is chapter 7. See 12 references listed below.[10] Allusions to Daniel appear at times to do more than provide phraseology. Rather, they are written in the perspective of a linear interpretation, in conformity with what we have found elsewhere in the NT. For example, Jesus comes with clouds (Rev 1:7; Dan 7:13), and He shows Himself to John as one like unto the Son of man (Rev 1:13; Dan 7:13).

As in Daniel, the action of the little horn ends in the war that it wages against the saints (Dan 7:21–22, 25), so in Revelation it is the same for the sea beast that utters blasphemies and makes war against the saints (Rev 13:1–10). To be sure, Revelation is an original work and not a copy of Daniel. The two books are marked, however, by similarities that justify their mutual reading as the Seventh-day Adventist Church does.

In addition to the many allusions to Daniel to be found in Revelation is the fact that both prophetic books share the common characteristics of apocalyptic writing.[11] Apocalyptic prophecy presents a cosmic sweep of the great controversy between good and evil, assuring the believer of God's control of history and the certainty of the vindication of His people in a glorious eschatalogical climax. Thus, the unfolding of their common theme serves to illuminate the respective prophecies of each.

Why Study Daniel and Revelation?

We now note three characteristics that especially justify the common study of Daniel and Revelation in our time.

Ethical quality. Ellen G. White writes concerning Daniel and Revelation, "When the books of Daniel and Revelation are better understood, believers will have an entirely different religious experience."[12] And again, "We need to study the working out of God's purpose in the history of nations and in the revelation of things to come, that we may estimate at their true value things seen and things unseen."[13]

Out of these apocalyptic books spring important ethical consequences. H. H. Rowley recognizes this truth when he writes, "The visions of Daniel and of the book of Revelation deserve our attention not only for the details of their form, but for the great spiritual principle that they uphold throughout."[14] The general conviction regarding this ethical characteristic is such that certain writers think it is the only one. P. Fruchon, for example, declares that the understanding of apocalyptic should be psychological or sociological, even aesthetic.[15]

It is in fact remarkable to note that Daniel and Revelation both begin with eminently ethical accounts (Dan 1:6–21; Rev 1:9). Throughout the visions there is presented a choice between faithfulness to the will of God or retreat before the terrible pressure of evil powers. The symbolic visions do not propose simply to denounce God's enemies, but to call believers to complete faithfulness to the One who reigns and who comes to render justice.

The ethical content of apocalyptic prophecy gives it an eternal character. It recalls that the prophetic content concerns the great conflict between Satan and God in which God's victory is guaranteed. Thus, attention is turned toward the final victory of God and its significance for the believer.

The faithful reader of Daniel and Revelation is not lost in speculation about the future, rather he finds in these two books a clear understanding of the time in which he lives and a motive for action. Like the apostle Paul, who announced the future coming of the Lord in the clouds of heaven and then advanced to the ethics of marriage, political attitudes, social relationships, and the like, just so the apocalyptic writers also sound an ethical dimension calling for the exercise of faith and obedience. Nothing can provide a better foundation for ethics than the expectation of a Saviour who is coming and the assurance Daniel and Revelation provide by the methodical and successive fulfillment of their prophecies.

Chronological characteristic. Chronology is a major element in the books of Daniel and Revelation. This is the second similar characteristic we shall consider.

Although J. Moltmann does not give eschatology the same meaning as Adventists do, he says with good reason, "Christianity is completely eschatology, it is hope, vision and orientation in advance, hence also a departure and a change from the present.... The eschatological perspective is not an aspect of Christianity, it is in every respect the centre of the Christian faith. There is assuredly only one real problem in Christian theology; it is presented to it by its purpose, and through it, it is posed to humanity and to human thought: it is the problem of the future."[16]

U. Vanni, too, recognizes that "Revelation would be, beyond its literary clothing, a book of prophecy."[17] And P. Prigent, who is not sympathetic toward a reading of Revelation in the Seventh-day Adventist style, has to admit that "it is not a question of reducing the message of Revelation to the affirmation of an eternal present. "The book," he says, "is full of statements relating to time and even to chronology. We must do justice to them."

These ideas are arranged both in Daniel and Revelation in a manner of recurrent composition. J. Lambrecht, who analyzed the structure of Revelation, declares that repetition and progression constitute the essential characteristics of the composition of the book.[18]

Now, if these characteristics relate Daniel and Revelation to one another, it relates them also in the method of ritual discourse. According to Levi-Strauss, this discourse is the opposite of myth and tries to "remake a continuity from a discontinuity."[19] Applied to history it could show that it forms an entity and tends toward a goal. Each section is a sequential resumption of the same global history in order to add details and to progress toward the explanation.

We have cited several references, but they show well that researchers of all shades of opinion admit, sometimes in spite of themselves, that apocalyptic prophecy demands it be oriented toward the future in a manner quite different from the classical prophets. "To the cry of the prophets, 'How long, O Lord, how long?' the apocalyptic writers give the year, the day, and the hour,"[20] as it were. "In other words, prophecy is understood no longer as a *promise* which unlocks the future but as a *prediction* of events which have to be fulfilled. At the same time apocalyptic interpretation understands itself and fulfills itself as *reckoning and forecast* ."[21]

Since Daniel and Revelation cover the same periods of history, they certainly deserve to be studied together. At points their chronological data overlap each other, expressed sometimes in the same terms (Rev 12:14; Dan 7:25).

Finally let us notice a last common element.

The Christ-centered nature of apocalyptic. We cannot fail to link Daniel and Revelation when we discover in each the central figure of the Son of man who comes in the clouds of heaven. "The Christian vision of history that comes to us from Patmos is first of all that: a vision of Christ and of His indivisible but certain and irresistible part in history."[22] The first prophetic word of Revelation concerns the coming of the Son of man on the clouds (1:7). The whole book is centered on this coming. It is given as a point of reference to almost every church (2:5, 16, 25; 3:3, 11, 20). It is given as a terminal point: "Surely I come quickly" (22:20, KJV).

Conclusion

Many relationships between Daniel and Revelation are evident. For example, the worship of the image of gold in Daniel 3 and of the image of the beast in Revelation 13; the vision of Christ in Daniel 10 and Revelation 1; the fall of Babylon in Daniel 5 and Revelation 14, and 18; the God who comes to deliver His own in Daniel 3 and 6 and Revelation 14; the beasts of Daniel 7 and Revelation 13 and 17; the times of Daniel 7 and Revelation 11, 12, etc. Both prophetic books overlap in their chronological data and ethical concerns.

Jesus Himself drew the attention of His contemporaries to the stone of Daniel 2 and to the Son of man of Daniel 7. The evangelists pointed to the Anointed One of Daniel 9. The central place of Christ in biblical apocalyptic, the emphasis placed on His coming; all these justify for every Christian the mutual study of Daniel and of Revelation.

Chapter VII

Ellen G. White's Use of Daniel and Revelation

George E. Rice

Editorial Synopsis. Some Adventist Bible students who propose dual fulfillments for selected prophecies in Daniel and Revelation argue that they find endorsement for this approach in the writings of Ellen G. White. A few would abandon the historicist method altogether in favor of a futurist form of interpretation. But there is no evidence that Ellen White thought the church would follow any other method of interpreting these prophecies than the historicist method.

In her own writings, the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation unroll in historical time from the days of Daniel and John until the establishment of the eternal kingdom of God. For example, she recognizes the sequential fulfillment across the Christian Era of the prophecies of Revelation in a major statement:

> In the Revelation are portrayed the deep things of God.... Its truths are addressed to those living in the last days of this earth's history, as well as to those living in the days of John. *Some of the scenes depicted in this prophecy are in the past, some are now taking place; some bring to view the close of the great conflict between the powers of darkness and the Prince of heaven, and some reveal the triumphs and joys of the redeemed in the earth made new.* (*The Acts of the Apostles*, [Mountain View, CA, 1911], 584, emphasis added.)

In this chapter the author demonstrates the historicist perspective of the pioneers and Ellen G. White. He examines a number of citations drawn from her writings that are alleged to teach a double fulfillment principle that can be applied to the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. The study focuses particularly on the significance of her oft repeated phrase, "history will be repeated" and her remarks regarding Christ's prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world.

Chapter Outline

I. Introduction
II. Pioneer Principles of Prophetic Interpretation
III. The Historicist Perspective
IV. Jerusalem Statements
V. Nonexpositional Uses of Prophetic Language
VI. An Expositor
VII. Conclusions

Introduction

Since the formation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church there has been a tendency on the part of some to move away from the sixteenth-century Reformation historicist approach to the interpretation of Bible prophecy. Whereas Adventists have turned to history for the fulfillment of prophecy and to understand the leading of God's hand in the affairs of nations, some believe that this approach to prophecy is a faulty hermeneutic.

Pointing to the great disappointment of 1844 as a prime example, some critics of the historicist method insist that Adventists today have closed the door of advancing truth by perpetuating the erroneous hermeneutics of the Adventist pioneers. Truth cannot be seen by the use of this method, they say, because Satan has counterfeited and manipulated secular history for the expressed purpose of misleading those who would interpret prophecy by the historicist method! Students of Daniel and Revelation must understand, rather, that the prophecies of both books have their fulfillment in a single generation—the last generation at the end of time. Thus, there are some who would look to the future for the fulfillment of most of Daniel and Revelation.

The purpose of this study is to examine Ellen White's understanding as to how the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation are to be studied, and how she herself used passages from these books in her own writings.

Pioneer Principles of Prophetic Interpretation

Ellen White is very clear that the Adventist pioneers who studied the messages of Daniel and Revelation were led by God as they used the historicist method to interpret apocalyptic prophecy. Concerning the experience of William Miller, she says,

> Link after link of the chain of truth rewarded his efforts, as step by step he traced down the great lines of prophecy. Angels of heaven were guiding his mind and opening the Scriptures to his understanding.
>
> Taking the manner in which the prophecies had been fulfilled in the past as a criterion by which to judge of the fulfillment of those which were still future, he became satisfied that the popular view of the spiritual reign of Christ—a temporal millennium before the end of the world—was not sustained by the word of God.[1]

Finding fault with the historicist method is not a new development among Adventists. Acknowledging that there were those in her day who wished to reinterpret these two books, Ellen White points out that these people did not understand that God was leading the very men who did a special work in setting forth truth at the appointed time.[2] "The Lord does not lay upon those who have not had an experience in His work the burden of making a new exposition of those prophecies which He has, by His Holy Spirit, moved upon His chosen servants to explain."[3]

Concerning the pioneer historicist interpretation of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, Ellen White says, "I repeat, He [God] is not leading anyone by His Holy Spirit to frame a theory that will unsettle faith in the solemn messages He has given His people to bear to our world."[4] In 1907 she wrote to A. G. Daniells, "We have searched the Scriptures; we have built solidly; and we have not had to tear up our foundations and put in new timbers."[5]

For the benefit of later generations, lest they forget, the experience of those who worked through the prophecies and who had a part in the proclamation of the first and second angels' messages should be rehearsed.

> The Lord has declared that the history of the past shall be rehearsed as we enter upon the closing work. Every truth that He has given for these last days is to be proclaimed to the world. Every pillar that He has established is to be strengthened. We cannot now step off the foundation that God has established. We cannot now enter into any new organization; for this would mean apostasy from the truth.[6]

The Historicist Perspective

Although Ellen White does not use the term "historicist," it is clear that she understood the only proper way to interpret Daniel and Revelation was to look for the unfolding of their prophecies within the historical events that have occurred throughout the ages. Rather than a tool in the hands of Satan to mislead and confuse God's people, human history, both secular and religious, is the basis for interpreting prophecy. "In the history of nations the student of God's word may behold the literal fulfillment of divine prophecy."[7]

Concerning the scroll of Revelation 5, Ellen White says, "There in His open hand lay the book, the roll of the history of God's providences, the prophetic history of nations and the church.... and the history of all ruling powers in the nations."[8] Link by link the history of the human race as outlined by God in His word, forms a prophetic chain. Within this chain we can tell "where we are today in the procession of the ages."[9] By beholding fulfilled prophecy within the course of human history, God's people face the future with confidence knowing what is to come.

Ellen White speaks in terms of the prophetic chain running through history. Link after link, God reveals history "from eternity in the past to eternity in the future."[10] She speaks in a similar way to the prophecies in Daniel and Revelation as she exhorts ministers and people alike to trace the lines of prophecy so that they "might have an intelligent understanding of the perils and conflicts before them."[11]

Concerning the nature of apocalyptic prophecy in general, she says, "The prophecies present a succession of events leading down to the opening of the judgment. This is especially true of the book of Daniel."[12] And concerning the prophecies of John, she writes,

> The book of Revelation opens to the world what has been, what is, and what is to come; it is for our instruction upon whom the ends of the world are come.... In this book are depicted scenes that are now in the past, and some of eternal interest that are taking place around us; other of its prophecies will not receive their complete fulfillment until the close of time, when the last great conflict between the powers of darkness and the Prince of heaven will take place.[13]

All Is Not Future

It is within the context of this prophetic chain concept that Ellen White's statement about the eleventh chapter of Daniel must be understood. "The prophecy of the eleventh chapter of Daniel has nearly reached its complete fulfillment."[14] The prophecy is indeed a chain, presenting link by link the events that down through history bear upon the experience of God's people until the end of time. Ellen White's emphasis is that we have now reached the final links in the chain.

That she understands the prophecy to find fulfillment within the successive history of nations is seen by the next sentence of Letter 103, 1904, "Much of the history that has taken place in fulfillment of this prophecy will be repeated." The events in the lives of humankind and the rise and fall of nations is what history is all about. Because prophecy predicts the rise and fall of nations and the events that will transpire, it is only logical that we look to history for an understanding of prophecy.

Each link in the prophetic chain is to prepare us to understand the next series of events that are themselves to become history. "Each period of the fulfillment of prophetic history is a preparation for the advanced light which will succeed each period. As the prophecy comes to the end, there is to be a perfect whole."[15]

Keeping in mind that history is the unfolding of a prophetic chain will guard us from the error of placing the fulfillment of all apocalyptic prophecy within a single generation—the last generation at the end of time. Statements like the following will be understood within the context of this chain: "The light that Daniel received from God was given especially for these last days. The visions he saw by the banks of the Ulai and Hiddekel, the great rivers of Shinar, are now in process of fulfillment, and all the events foretold will soon come to pass."[16] This statement can hardly mean that none of Daniel's prophecies will be fulfilled prior to the climactic events of history. For Daniel himself tells us that certain symbols in this book refer to Babylon, Persia, and Greece. It is in those prophecies taken up by John in the Revelation, which realize their fulfillment in the preaching of the first, second, and third angels' messages, that Daniel stands in his lot.

"Daniel shall stand in his lot at the end of the days [Dan. 12:13]. John sees the little book unsealed. Then Daniel's prophecies have their proper place in the first, second, and third angels' messages to be given to the world."[17]

Ellen White warns against misapplying prophecy. She says such experiences "begin by turning away from the light that God has already given."[18] Part of the danger she warns against is the desire on the part of some to find a future fulfillment for prophecies that have already met fulfillment. "There are those who are searching the Scriptures for proof that these messages [three angels'] are still in the future. They gather together the truthfulness of the messages, but they fail to give them their proper place in prophetic history."[19]

The servant of the Lord warns,

> The great waymarks of truth, showing us our bearings in prophetic history, are to be carefully guarded, lest they be torn down, and replaced with theories that would bring confusion rather than genuine light....
>
> Some will take the truth applicable to their time, and place it in the future. Events in the train of prophecy that had their fulfillment away in the past are made future, and thus by these theories the faith of some is undermined.
>
> From the light that the Lord has been pleased to give me, you are in danger of doing the same work, presenting before others truths which have had their place and done their specific work for the time, in the history of the faith of the people of God. You recognize these facts in Bible history as true, but apply them to the future. They have their force still in their proper place, in the chain of events that have made us a people what we are today, and as such, they are to be presented to those who are in the darkness of error.[20]

History—Not Prophecy—to be Repeated

Ellen White repeatedly states that as the controversy between Christ and Satan moves toward its climax, scenes from former pages of history will be repeated. Thus it is that she says, "Study Revelation in connection with Daniel, for history will be repeated."[21] She does not say that specific prophecies in these two books will be repeated, but that *events* similar to those that fulfilled them in the past will be seen again.

These events will be seen within a different context, within a different time frame, and with different actors. Thus they are not the same events that fulfilled the prophecies, but similar events. The issues, however, will be the same as those that led to the historic events that originally fulfilled certain prophecies in the controversy between good and evil.

> The Lord has set before me matters which are of urgent importance for the present time, and which reach into the future. The words have been spoken in a charge to me, "Write in a book [*The Great Controversy*] the things which thou hast seen and heard, and let it go to all people; for the time is at hand when past history will be repeated."[22]

Circumstances similar to those that fulfilled prophecy in the past may exist in the present. Present circumstances are not, however, a fulfillment of the prophecy, for the prophecy was fulfilled historically by the original set of circumstances. But the present generation may be informed by the study of the prophecy and the historical record of the events that fulfilled it, and thus be prepared to play an intelligent role in the similar, present circumstances. So it is that a prophecy, previously fulfilled, may in this sense be "applied" to a present situation. Isaiah 58:12–14 may be cited as an example.

> The prophet thus points out the ordinance which has been forsaken: "Thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in." … This prophecy also applies in our time. The breach was made in the law of God when the Sabbath was changed by the Roman power. But the time has come for that divine institution to be restored. The breach is to be repaired and the foundation of many generations to be raised up.[23]

Here we see the issue is the same—the controversy between good and evil. Circumstances are similar. People professing great righteousness in Isaiah's day were "trampling upon the divine precepts." But we have different contexts—the Jewish nation and the Christian church; a different time frame—seventh century B.C. and twentieth century A.D.; different actors—the Jewish people/Isaiah and the Christian church/God's remnant people. A study of Isaiah's prophecy and its fulfillment may be applied to the experience of God's remnant people to help them see their role as repairers of a similar breach made in the law of God in the Christian Era.

Returning to Ellen White's statement about Daniel 11, we see how this principle can be applied. "The prophecy in the eleventh [chapter] of Daniel has nearly reached its complete fulfillment. Much of the history that has taken place in fulfillment of this prophecy will be repeated."[24] Events in history have already fulfilled certain predictions in this chapter. However, similar circumstances will again develop at the close of the great controversy, and in this cosmic struggle history will be seen as repeating itself. Ellen White does not suggest that those prophecies in Daniel 11 that have already been fulfilled will receive a second fulfillment.

Notice the various contexts, prophetic and nonprophetic, within which Ellen White says history will be repeated. Also notice she is not suggesting that a given prophecy itself is to be repeated.

Great empires of Daniel's prophecy. "Prophecy has traced the rise and fall of the world's great empires—Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. With each of these, as with nations of less power, *history repeated itself*. Each had its period of test, each failed, its glory faded, its power departed, and its place was occupied by another."[25]

The prophecies concerning these nations of antiquity met fulfillment. Similar circumstances have been seen in the history of other nations, great and small. Each has been tested, each has failed, each has lost its glory and power, and each has been replaced by another. Thus the history of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome has been repeated. But the *prophecy* relating to these specific kingdoms has been fulfilled only once.

Persecution of God's people. "We are standing on the threshold of great and solemn events. Many of the prophecies are about to be fulfilled in quick succession. Every element of power is about to be set to work. *Past history will be repeated*; old controversies will arouse to new life, and peril will beset God's people on every side."[26]

More specifically, "The scenes of persecution enacted during Christ's life will be enacted by false religionists till the close of time. Men think they have a right to take into their charge the consciences of men, and work out their theories of apostasy and transgression. *History will be repeated*."[27]

The prophecies that predicted the suffering of the Messiah have met their fulfillment. They will not be repeated, but the scenes of abuse that Christ suffered will be repeated in the experiences of His followers, and thus history will be repeated.

Noah, Sodom and Gomorrah. "*History will be repeated*. Christ declared that prior to His second coming the world would be as it was in the days of Noah, when men reached such a pass in following their own sinful imagination that God destroyed them by a flood."[28]

> And Jude says, "Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire."
> Here is presented to us a state of things which has been, and *history will be repeated*.[29]

Fourth horse (Rev 6:7–8). In Revelation 6 the fourth horse symbolizes the religious intolerance and persecution that existed in Europe under the papal power. "The same spirit is seen today that is represented in Revelation 6:6–8. *History is to be repeated*. That which has been will be again."[30] Once more, it is evident that the statement deals with a repetition of history, not a second fulfillment of prophecy. In each case the context, the time, and the actors are different.

Nebuchadnezzar. "It is a fearful thing for any soul to place himself on Satan's side of the question; for as soon as he does this a change passes over him, as it is said of the king of Babylon, that his visage changed toward the three faithful Hebrews. *Past history will be repeated*. Men will reject the Holy Spirit's working, and open the door of the mind to satanic attributes that separate them from God."[31]

Thus, Ellen White does not speak in terms of a given prophecy receiving a second fulfillment. That would necessitate the same historical context, the same time frame, and the same actors. However, she does speak in terms of similar circumstances, but a different context, time frame, and actors. Within these similar circumstances the original historic events that once fulfilled prophecy will be repeated, such as the rise and fall of nations, persecution, etc.

Some misunderstood statements. Before leaving this topic there are two statements that should be noted. Both may be easily misunderstood and the conclusion drawn that Ellen White advocates the idea that the fulfillment of an apocalyptic prophecy may be repeated. She says, "Some prophecies God has repeated…." The context is not suggesting that some prophecies will have a multiple fulfillment, but that some prophecies given in Daniel are of such importance God saw fit to have John restate them in his book. Both the prophecy of Daniel and that of Revelation will have only a single fulfillment.[32]

Then there is the following well-known statement:

> The great work of the gospel is not to close with less manifestation of the power of God than marked its opening. The prophecies which were fulfilled in the outpouring of the former rain at the opening of the gospel are again to be fulfilled in the latter rain at its close.[33]

It would appear at first glance that here is a case where Ellen White speaks of a single prophecy having a dual fulfillment. However, we must remember that the prophecies she cites in this passage that predict the former rain also predict a second event, the latter rain. In the context Ellen White quotes Hosea 6:3, "and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth," and Joel 2:23, "he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain." So Hosea's and Joel's single statements look forward to two separate events: the early and the latter rain endowments of the Spirit upon the church.

Jerusalem Statements

Statements made by Ellen White concerning the prophecies of Matthew 24 are most frequently seized upon as proof for dual/multiple fulfillments or for future fulfillments of all prophecy. However, we must keep the following in mind when dealing with our Lord's apocalyptic prophecy:

1. The discourse deals with two major events, not just a single event.

> Jesus did not answer His disciples by taking up separately the destruction of Jerusalem and the great day of His coming. He mingled the description of these two events.... In mercy to them He blended the description of the two great crises, leaving the disciples to study out the meaning for themselves.[34]

2. Matthew 24 is a prophetic chain.

> In Matthew 24, in answer to the question of His disciples concerning the sign of His coming and of the end of the world, Christ had pointed out some of the most important events in the history of the world and of the church from His first to His second advent; namely, the destruction of Jerusalem, the great tribulation of the church under the pagan and papal persecutions, the darkening of the sun and moon, and the falling of the stars. After this He spoke of His coming in His kingdom, and related the parable describing the two classes of servants who look for His appearing.[35]

3. The fate of Jerusalem is a prophetic type of the fate of the world. "The ruin of Jerusalem was a *symbol* of the final ruin that shall overwhelm the world. The prophecies that received a partial fulfillment in the overthrow of Jerusalem have a more direct application to the last day."[36]

Thus, the fate of Jerusalem becomes a type of future events.[37]

4. Like Daniel, some of the prophecies in Matthew's prophetic chain are taken up by John and repeated in Revelation.

> Said Jesus: "The stars shall fall from heaven." Matthew 24:29. And John in the Revelation declared, as he beheld in vision the scenes that should herald the day of God: "The stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind." Revelation 6:13. This prophecy received a striking and impressive fulfillment in the great meteoric shower of November 13, 1833.[38]

The preceding categories summarize Ellen White's statements on Jesus' apocalyptic sermon. Time and space will not permit an examination of each statement, but representative references are given above.

There is one statement that must be examined, however, because it has been used as proof for multiple fulfillment.

> In the prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction Christ said, "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." This prophecy will again be fulfilled. The abounding iniquity of that day finds its counterpart in this generation. So with the prediction in regard to the preaching of the gospel.[39]

The following are to be noted: (1) Ellen White's statement takes into account that this is a two-part prophecy dealing with events surrounding the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the world. (2) The fate of Jerusalem is a prophetic-type of what awaits the world, as can be seen in the words, "In the prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction.... The abounding iniquity of that day finds its counterpart in this generation." (3) The prophetic-type is applied to the loss of love and the preaching of the gospel.

Two separate and distinct prophecies are being addressed. The first is not to have a dual or multiple fulfillment. For the temple would have to be reconstructed and the city fall a second time. The fulfillment of the first part of this prophecy was a once-for-all event. This prophetic fulfillment, however, was itself an example of the more extensive events that will fulfill the second part of the prophecy.[40]

Nonexpositional Uses of Prophetic Language

Ellen White used passages from Daniel and Revelation much as she used other portions of Scripture. Several examples follow.

Descriptive Purposes

This can be seen clearly in *The Great Controversy* where she describes the Second Advent.[41] Verses and parts of verses are woven freely into her descriptive account, producing a flowing narrative of the event.
As she describes the final, "desperate struggle" between the powers of good and evil, she says,

> The power of the Holy Ghost must be upon us, and the Captain of the Lord's host will stand at the head of the angels of heaven to direct the battle. Solemn events before us are yet to transpire. Trumpet after trumpet is to be sounded, vial after vial poured out one after another upon the inhabitants of the earth.[42]

Obviously the reference to the trumpets is not an attempt to interpret their meaning, nor to tie them to the seven last plagues. Her intent, rather, is to impress the reader with the magnitude and the devastating consequences of the closing struggle.
While describing the end-time trials and victories of God's people, she weaves in Revelation 14:1.

> While Satan was urging his accusations and seeking to destroy this company, holy angels, unseen, were passing to and fro, placing upon them the seal of the living God. These are they that stand upon Mount Zion with the Lamb, having the Father's name written in their foreheads. They sing the new song before the throne, that song which no man can learn save the hundred and forty and four thousand.[43]

Ellen White is not writing a discourse on the 144,000, nor is she attempting to identify them. She simply uses Revelation 14:1 for descriptive purposes and then fills out the scene by quoting Revelation directly: "These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth," etc.

Illustrative Purposes

This example is somewhat similar to the above. However, where Ellen White uses passages to enhance her description in the previous example, here she uses short sentences from Daniel and Revelation to illustrate what she has just said. For example, she reinforces her statement that a few upon earth remain true to God by quoting Revelation 14:12, "Not all in this world have taken sides with the enemy against God. Not all have become disloyal. There are a faithful few who are true to God; for John writes: 'Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.' Revelation 14:12."[44]

Again, as she describes the showers of grace that will come in the latter rain, she uses Revelation 18:1 to illustrate what she had just presented.

> We must not wait for the latter rain. It is coming upon all who will recognize and appropriate the dew and showers of grace that fall upon us. When we gather up the fragments of light, when we appreciate the sure mercies of God, who loves to have us trust Him, then every promise will be fulfilled.... The whole earth is to be filled with the glory of God.[45]

Incorporation of Language

Time and again Ellen White will incorporate the language of Daniel and Revelation into her description of a scene given her by the Lord, or into her narrative of a biblical event. This is similar to the example cited above in which she uses Scripture or scriptural language to describe a scene. Here, however, we note she often incorporates scriptural language into her own use of words. We cite, for an example, a view of the investigative judgment given to her on October 23, 1879.[46]

Throughout her account she incorporates the language of Daniel and Revelation. Phrases used include: "ten thousand times ten thousand," "several books were before Him," "another book was opened," "you are weighed in the balances and found wanting," "Why have you not washed your robes of character and made them white in the blood of the Lamb?" "He that is unjust let him be unjust still," etc. In *The Great Controversy* volume Ellen White gives a description of Adam and his descendants being ushered into the Holy City. Again we can see how she incorporates the language of Daniel and Revelation into her own language.[47]

Expansion

On occasion Ellen White, having cited a passage, will expand upon it. For example, she quotes Revelation 5:11, "I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne." She then elaborates upon the citation by describing how the angels unite with Jesus in the work of ministering to those who are to receive the seal of God. She tells how angels are a restraining power to the forces of evil, how they belt the earth refusing Satan his claim over God's people, and how they are the ministers of Jehovah.[48]

Sometimes Ellen White begins a chapter by quoting a passage of Scripture; for example, she begins chapter 38 of *The Great Controversy* ("The Final Warning") by citing Revelation 18:1, 2, 4. The chapter then becomes an expansion of this passage. Immediately following the quote are several lines of interpretation.

> This scripture points forward to a time when the announcement of the fall of Babylon, as made by the second angel of Revelation 14 (verse 8), is to be repeated, with the additional mention of the corruptions which have been entering the various organizations that constitute Babylon, since that message was first given, in the summer of 1844.[49]

This short interpretation is then followed by the descriptive expansion in the remainder of the chapter, "A terrible condition of the religious world is here described."

Didactic Use

Spiritual teaching is strengthened by the use of passages from Daniel and Revelation. For example, after quoting Daniel 12:1, Ellen White deals with the sealing and the close of probation while working in the counsel of the True Witness from Revelation 3:18.[50] In the course of interpreting the parable, the man without a wedding garment, she uses Revelation 22:12 to teach that the character of every man's work will be determined before Jesus returns "to give every man according as his work shall be."[51]

Pastoral Advice

Often Ellen White shows a pastoral concern for God's people. Scripture is freely used, including Daniel and Revelation, in these passages of pastoral admonitions. Daniel 8:14 forms the basis of a pastoral appeal to be ready for the solemn time of judgment.

> What is our condition in this fearful and solemn time?... Shall we not search the Scriptures, that we may know where we are in this world's history? Shall we not become intelligent in regard to the work that is being accomplished for us at this time, and the position that we as sinners should occupy while this work of atonement is going forward? If we have any regard for our souls' salvation, we must make a decided change. We must seek the Lord with true penitence; we must with deep contrition of soul confess our sins, that they may be blotted out.[52]

Examples similar to this abound in Ellen White's writings.

Extended Use

The extended use of scripture is seen frequently in the NT and in the writings of Ellen White. This occurs when an inspired writer gives a meaning to a passage that is beyond what the original writer intended. For example, Ellen White writes, "The mingling of churchcraft and statecraft is represented by the iron and the clay,"[53] a statement based on Nebuchadnezzar's vision of the metallic image (Dan 2:43). This moves beyond simple interpretation based upon context, words, syntax, etc. Here an inspired writer gives a new meaning to a familiar passage, much as Paul does in Galatians 3:16, with Genesis 22:18.

Another example may be seen in which Ellen White extends Revelation 1:7 (a reference to the Second Advent) to the end of the millennium. "Then at the close of the one thousand years, Jesus, with the angels and all the saints, leaves the Holy City, and while He is descending to the earth with them, the wicked dead are raised, and then the very men that 'pierced Him,' being raised, will see Him afar off in all His glory, and the angels and saints with Him, and will wail because of Him."[54]

An Expositor

Some are reluctant to say that Ellen White exegetes Scripture. It is true that she did not work as an exegete would today—doing word studies and examining in detail the syntax of passages in the original languages, etc. However, there is no question that she is an interpreter of Scripture, including the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. As we noted earlier, the basic prophecies had been studied and explained by the pioneers of the Advent movement under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. These interpretations are endorsed by Ellen White in her own presentation of these subjects, for example, in *The Great Controversy*.

However, Ellen White builds upon the work of the pioneers by fleshing out their earlier work with extensive interpretative details. This work of interpretation can be seen in the additional details dealing with (1) the role of evil supernatural forces in the closing conflict,[55] (2) especially, the description of Satan's attempt to impersonate Jesus,[56] (3) the threefold union between Protestantism, Catholicism, and spiritualism,[57] (4) conditions upon which the mark of the beast will be received,[58] etc. Here are only a few examples of many that show Ellen White at work as an interpreter of prophecy.

Conclusions

As a result of this study we may draw the following conclusions.

1. Ellen White endorses the historicist approach to interpreting prophecy. This method of prophetic interpretation was used by the pioneers in the formative years of our church.

2. Although Ellen White did not use the term "historicist," it is clear that she understood this approach to prophecy to be the only correct method for its interpretation.

3. Ellen White counsels that there is a very real danger in looking to the future for *all* prophetic fulfillment.

4. Events similar to those that fulfilled a given prophecy may arise. Thus, history is repeated—not the fulfillment of the prophecy. If the prophecy were to be fulfilled again it would require the same historical context, the same time frame, and the same actors.

5. When dealing with Ellen White's statements on Jesus' apocalyptic discourse recorded in the Synoptic Gospels, it must be remembered that this discourse (1) centers around two major predictions—the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world; (2) but yet is a prophetic chain; and (3) presents the fate of Jerusalem as a prophecy of the fate of the world, yet both events are separate and distinct.

6. Apart from her straightforward expositions of the prophecies along historicist lines, Ellen White at times employed their phraseology and imagery in a nontechnical, pastoral manner.

Chapter VIII

The Interpreter's Use of the Writings of Ellen G. White

Jon Paulien

Editorial Synopsis. Like the apostle John, Ellen G. White was steeped in the language of the Scriptures. Although she and her pioneer associates believed that the Holy Spirit had bestowed upon her the prophetic gift, she always recognized and acknowledged the authority of the Holy Scriptures (the Old and New Testaments) as the ultimate rule for faith and practice. She wrote:

> In His word, God has committed to men the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience. (*The Great Controversy* [Mountain View, CA, 1950], vii.)

Ellen White saw her particular role, under the Spirit, to be that of clarifying and applying Bible truths and principles to believers' lives and forwarding the mission of the church.

> I recommend to you, dear reader, the Word of God as the rule of your faith and practice. By that Word we are to be judged. God has, in that Word, promised to give visions in the *'last days'*; not for a new rule of faith, but for the comfort of His people, and to correct those who err from Bible truth. (*Early Writings* [Washington, DC, 1945], 78, emphasis in original.)

Like a pastor, Ellen White employs the Scriptures in several different ways. Sometimes, she presents a straightforward exposition, as may be seen in such works as *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* (Christ's major recorded sermon) and *Christ's Object Lessons* (Christ's parables). At other times she adapts the phraseology of the Scriptures so as to portray their larger theological picture or to apply their teachings in a homiletical manner. Such usage of biblical phrasing may express a universal truth, although it may not harmonize with the context from which the phraseology was appropriated.

Because of this varied (but proper) use of Scripture, the student is faced at times with a certain ambiguity in Ellen White's citation of Bible passages. The overall message will be clear; the intent, plain. But the problem arises when the student desires to know if the cited text of Scripture is being used and explained in its context, or whether its phraseology has been borrowed to express something other than what it means in its primary setting.

In this chapter the author suggests fundamental ground rules for the student to employ when faced with such an ambiguity, lest he misunderstand the intent of an Ellen White statement, the Scripture passage employed—or both. Rightly used, the writings of Ellen White continue to shed important light on both the teachings and prophecies of Holy Scripture.

Chapter Outline

I. Introduction
II. Basic Principles
III. Principles Illustrated
IV. Conclusion

Introduction

Adventist interpreters of Revelation share a deep appreciation for the writings of Ellen G. White. Her comments on the book of Revelation stimulate much productive insight, particularly to the "big picture"; namely, how the symbolic visions of Revelation contribute to the cosmic perspective of the "great controversy." She was well aware that Revelation brings together language, ideas, and types from throughout Scripture, forming a consummate conclusion to the Bible as a whole.[1] Thus, Adventist scholarship would be remiss to ignore her perspective on the symbols and theology of the book of Revelation.

Having said this, we must also remind interpreters that the writings of Ellen White can be misused in such a way as to obscure the meaning of the biblical text and make it serve the agenda of the interpreter.[2] Offhand comments in various contexts can be universalized or applied in ways that run counter to the implications of the biblical text itself.[3] Such use is really abuse and results in diminishing her authority rather than enhancing it.[4]

Inspiration is truly handled with respect when the intention of an inspired writer is permitted to emerge from the text in its original context (exegesis). We must avoid reading into a passage our own interests and presuppositions (eisegesis). Messages from living prophets could be clarified upon request. But since this is no longer possible, we are on safest ground when the intent of the written message is allowed to surface by means of careful exegesis. The desire to establish a particular position offers no license to do with the text whatever the interpreter wants.[5]

Interpreters with strong preconceived ideas sometimes utilize Ellen White's scriptural quotations in such a way as to overthrow the plain meaning of the text in its biblical setting.[6] Inferences drawn from the text of Revelation are at times creatively combined with inferences drawn from the Spirit of Prophecy to produce a result that cannot be demonstrated by either a natural reading of Revelation or of the writings of Ellen White.[7]

Though usually well-intentioned, such sidetracks divert our readers/hearers from the plain meaning of the text and encourage careless methods of interpretation that can damage the cause of God. With the goal of safeguarding her inspired intention, we suggest now some tentative guidelines for the use of Ellen White in the study of Revelation.

Basic Principles

Citation or echo? It is important to determine whether Ellen White is intending to cite a particular biblical text or is merely "echoing" it. The same procedure we apply to Revelation's allusions to the OT would be helpful here as well. When she simply echoes a text, she is not expressing a judgment on the biblical writer's intention for the use of that text. She may be drawing a valid spiritual lesson when she echoes Scripture, but it is not necessarily the same lesson the biblical writer sought to impress upon his readers in the original setting.

Use: exegesis, theology, or homily? When Ellen White clearly refers the reader to a scriptural passage, the reader should ask how she is using the passage. Is she using it exegetically—making a statement about the meaning of the passage in the author's context? Is she using it theologically—discussing the implication that the passage has for a larger theology based on Scripture as a whole? Is she using it homiletically—enjoying the effectiveness of the biblical language that moves people to action in a worship setting?[8]

To interpret a homiletical usage as though it were an exegetical statement will distort not only her intention in its use but the meaning of the biblical statement as well. While more study needs to be done on this question, it is my opinion that Ellen White rarely uses Scripture exegetically (that is, expounding the biblical writer's intent).[9] As was the case with the classical prophets of the OT, her main concern is to speak to her contemporary situation. This will generally cause her to use Scripture theologically and homiletically rather than exegetically.

To say this, is not to limit Ellen White's authority. Her intention in a given statement should be taken with utmost seriousness. At the same time we must be careful not to limit the authority of the Bible writer. We ought not to deny the Bible writer's primary meaning on the basis of a homiletical usage of his passage. What I am pleading for here is that we respect Ellen White's own intention in her handling of biblical material. Since she often uses Scripture in other than exegetical ways, statements quoting Revelation must be examined with great care before being applied dogmatically in the exegesis of the book.[10]

Consistent intention? Ellen White herself makes a distinction between her published writings and other material.[11] Thus, we can best understand her theological intention in the writings that were most carefully written and edited by her. Offhand comments in letters or stenographically reproduced from sermons may not reflect her settled opinion on timeless issues. Compilations of her writings assembled by pastors or laity need to be used even more cautiously, since the ordering of material can, in itself, make a theological statement. If something is found only in letters and manuscripts, particularly if it occurs only once, the interpreter needs to determine that it is a true reflection of her considered and consistent intent.

Central to argument? The question should be asked, Is Ellen White's use of a given scripture text critical to the conclusion she comes to in a given portion of her writings? If her use is peripheral to her central theme, it may not partake of a thought-out exegesis. As is the case with Scripture, we are on safest ground when we refer to passages in which the specific topic we are concerned with is being discussed. Since much of Revelation is never made central to any of her discussions, we must exercise caution in drawing firm conclusions from peripheral uses of Revelation in such discussions.[12]

Later clarification? Ellen White's later writings should be allowed to clarify positions taken in earlier writings. As her skills as a writer increased, her ability to express accurately and clearly the thoughts she received from God correspondingly increased. And as earlier statements were opposed or became subject to controversy, she would offer clarifying statements to make her intention clear. A well-known example of this is found in *Early Writings*, pages 85–96, where she offers a series of clarifications of earlier statements and visionary descriptions.[13]

Frequency of concept. How often did she utilize a scriptural passage in a particular way? Generally speaking, the number of times a specific concept is repeated is in direct proportion to the writer's burden that the concept be clearly understood by the reading public. It is not a safe procedure to base an interpretation on a single passage. An idea that is repeated in a variety of circumstances and by different expressions is not easily misunderstood or misused.

Problem of ambiguity. The main reason for suggesting these basic guidelines in determining her intent is the problem of ambiguity in Ellen White's writings. Her statements are at times susceptible of more than one interpretation.[14] This is not due to confusion or lack of clarity on her part necessarily; it is due to the fact that she often did not address the questions directly that concern us most today. Unbiased readers may find statements that answer our concerns with less clarity than we would prefer. The biased reader, however, when confronted with an ambiguous statement, picks the option that best fits his preconceived ideas and hammers it home to those who might disagree.

The reality is that many exegetical questions cannot be clarified from the Ellen White writings. The wisest course is to avoid using ambiguous statements as definitive evidence to prove a point. It is always appropriate, of course to point out the possibilities inherent in such statements.

Principles Illustrated

To illustrate the use of these six principles it may be helpful to examine the statement in *Early Writings*.[15]

> An angel with a writer's inkhorn by his side returned from the earth and reported to Jesus that his work was done, and the saints were numbered and sealed. Then I saw Jesus, who had been ministering before the ark containing the ten commandments, throw down the censer. He raised His hands, and with a loud voice said, *"It is done."* And all the angelic host laid off their crowns as Jesus made the solemn declaration, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still."

The subject of this passage is the close of probation. Ellen White utilizes language reminiscent of Ezekiel 9,[16] Revelation 8:5,[17] Revelation 16:17,[18] and then quotes Revelation 22:11. The latter two texts (Rev 16:17; 22:11) clearly belong in a "close of probation" context. Our interest concerns the significance of her use of the language of Revelation 8:5 in this context ("the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth," KJV).

Does Ellen White—in the *Early Writings* passage—understand the act of throwing down the censer depicted in Revelation 8:5 to be a reference to the end-time close of probation? We will apply the guidelines sketched above in an attempt to determine the answer correctly.

First, it is not clear that she intended the reader to perceive an allusion to Revelation 8:5 in her *Early Writings* statement. The phrase, "throw down the censer," is certainly unmistakable. *If* there is an allusion to Scripture at all, when in vision she sees Jesus "throw down the censer," it is clearly an allusion to Revelation 8:5. But a number of indications demonstrate that she was *not* alluding to Revelation 8:5 in an *exegetical* manner. Note her observations: It is Jesus who ministers the incense, not an angel. Jesus ministers before the ark, not at the altar of incense. Jesus throws down the censer in front of the ark, not to the earth. Thus, her statement merely echoes the language of Revelation 8:5 without referring the reader to that text. It is precarious to draw specific exegetical information from an echo of biblical language.

Second, no attempt to exegete Revelation 8:5 is evident in the passage. The statement is part of a visionary description of a future event: the close of probation. As such, it is a theological or homiletical usage of Revelation 8:5. The meaning of Revelation 8:5 in the original context is not addressed.

Third, the statement occurs in a published work that was edited with considerable care. However, since the echo is unique to this statement, it is indecisive for determining whether her settled understanding associated Revelation 8:5 with the end-time close of probation.

Fourth, as mentioned earlier, the exegesis of Revelation 8:5 is not central to the issue in *Early Writings*, pages 279–280. The issue at hand is a description of the close of probation, not the context of Revelation 8. The phraseology—throwing down the censer—could be omitted without materially affecting the theological content of the statement.

Fifth, the statement is an early one. Thus, an interpreter wishing to understand her usage here should be prepared for the possibility that a later statement may decisively clarify this one. The possible implications of this statement should not be pressed in the face of a later one, particularly if the later statement significantly modifies the material at issue.

Finally, the allusion only occurs one time in all of her available works. Even if its meaning appeared clear to all interpreters, it could be questioned whether Ellen White's intention in the allusion had been rightly understood. Certainly she has not gone out of her way in her writings to clarify the relation of Revelation 8:5 to the close of probation.

To summarize: As much as we would like to have exegetical help in determining the meaning of Revelation 8:5 and its context, *Early Writings*, pages 279–280, though it may well allude to Revelation 8:5, should not be used for that purpose. It is not exegetical or central to the topic in its context, neither is it reasonably certain that Ellen White intended the reader to perceive an allusion to Revelation 8:5.

Of great interest to this issue is the fact that the statement is later repeated (nearly in its entirety) in *The Great Controversy*, page 613. That statement is quoted below with the italics representing all words that are identical to the passage in *Early Writings*.

> *An angel returning from the earth* announces *that his work is done*; the final test has been brought upon the world, and all who have proved themselves loyal to the divine precepts have received "the *seal* of the living God." Then Jesus ceases His intercession in the sanctuary above. *He lifts His hands and with a loud voice says, "It is done;" and all the angelic host lay off their crowns as He makes the solemn announcement: "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still."* Revelation 22:11.[19]

The subject of this passage and two-thirds of the wording are identical with *Early Writings*, pages 279–280. Even where the wording is changed the basic meaning is the same. But two significant changes in Ellen White's use of Scripture have taken place. The language of Ezekiel 9 and Revelation 8:5 has been dropped. In place of Revelation 8:5 is the statement that Jesus "ceases His intercession in the sanctuary above."

The Great Controversy passage clarifies the meaning of the earlier passage. Apparently, Ellen White did not want to leave the impression that her allusion was intended to be taken as an exposition of Revelation 8:5 in its context. Therefore, in the later depiction she employed explicit terminology instead of an echo of Revelation 8:5.

This illustration indicates that to carry out these guidelines takes patience and time. Probably, in many cases, the flavor of her viewpoint may be obtained by a careful surface survey of her statements. It becomes essential to follow these guidelines carefully, however, whenever a particular statement or series of statements becomes controversial, usually due to ambiguity. In such instances the burden of proof is on the interpreter to demonstrate that Ellen White (were she alive) would support his particular use of a given statement.

Conclusion

After thorough study of the scriptural text, it will be helpful for the Adventist interpreter to examine Ellen White's use of Revelation for profitable insights. Her unparalleled grasp of the universal issues to which the book of Revelation points makes her statements about the book of enormous interest and importance.

Nevertheless, her contribution to the discussion must not be expanded beyond her own intention. To do so will distort both her intention and John's, thus undermining the authority of inspiration. The above guidelines can help provide safeguards against such unintentional misuse.

II

Exegetical Studies

Revelation 4:1–8:1
Revelation 8:2–11:18
Revelation 10:1–11
Daniel 12/Revelation 13 Time Periods

Chapter IX

Issues in Revelation: DARCOM Report*

The distinctive frame that holds together the picture of biblical truth as taught by Seventh-day Adventists is their understanding of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. In these prophecies the Adventist people have found their times, their identity, and their task. Jesus Christ is at the center of the prophetic Word, and its dynamic in the Adventist faith (John 14:29; 2 Peter 1:19).

Seventh-day Adventists arrived at their interpretation of Bible prophecy by employing the principles of the historical school of prophetic interpretation, sometimes called the historicist method or the continuous historical method. The historicist method accepts the assumption that the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation are intended to unfold and to find fulfillment in historical time—in the span between the prophets Daniel and John respectively and the final establishment of God's eternal kingdom. The year-day principle (a symbolic day equals a literal year) is an integral part of the method; for it functions to unroll the symbolic time periods, enabling us to locate the predicted events along the highway of history.

Jesus employed the historicist method when He announced the time of His ministry as a fulfillment of prophecy (Mark 1:15; cf. Dan 9:25), and later when He referred to the prophesied ruin of Jerusalem and the Temple (Matt 24:15; cf. Dan 9:26). The Millerites, our immediate forebears, were historicists, as were also the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformers.

In its endeavor to meet Protestant interpretations, the Roman Catholic Church introduced *preterism* and *futurism* as counter methods of interpretation. These two methods form the basis of two schools of present-day interpretation of Daniel and Revelation. The preterist/historical-critical position regards the prophecies of Daniel as meeting fulfillment in the times and events of second century B.C. Palestine, and restricts Revelation to the first centuries A.D. Futurism slices off the seventieth week of Daniel's 70-week prophecy, placing it at the end of the age, where it also expects the fulfillment of most of the book of Revelation. Today Seventh-day Adventists virtually stand alone as exponents of the historicist method, since non-Catholic groups in general have abandoned this approach in favor of one of the other two methods mentioned. As might be expected, the change in method has inevitably brought about changes in conclusions.

The Daniel and Revelation Committee wishes to reaffirm to the world church the validity of the historicist approach to these two apocalyptic books. The committee sees it as the only sound method to use. Our pioneers did not follow "cunningly devised fables" when they searched and preached the truths of these prophecies. They have passed on to us a rich heritage. We call our members to a renewed study of these grand prophetic books that continue to give certainty and stability to our personal faith in Christ and His coming and to the worldwide outreach of the Advent people in this solemn era of God's judgment activity in the heavenly sanctuary (Rev 14:6–14; Dan 7:9, 10, 13, 14).

Not all segments of Daniel and Revelation are as clearly understood as others. There is a tendency for some earnest persons to focus on the lesser understood portions to such an extent that they miss the grand sweep of the clearer passages and the important theological truths they present for our times. The desire to unlock these obscure portions prompts the tendency to alter methodology and to employ unsound principles in order to find satisfactory solutions. Two sections of Revelation especially fall into this category: the seals (Rev 4:1–8:1) and the trumpets (Rev 8:2–11:17). While the church may never fully understand these portions of the larger prophecy, we can learn important lessons from them, and we would encourage personal study.

The committee at this point has not developed a satisfactory interpretation of these prophecies that solves all the problems inherent in them, but it has come to agreement on some general principles and some specific insights. If we would preserve the truth and secure a true interpretation of these challenging prophecies, we must do our study within the parameters of sound principles of interpretation. The committee agrees on the following points, and submits them to our pastors and members for their prayerful consideration.

General Principles

The committee agrees that:

1. The literary structure divides the book of Revelation into two major sections: (1) a historical section (Rev 1–14) that emphasizes the experience of the church and related events during the Christian Era, and (2) an eschatological (end-time) section (Rev 15–22) that focuses particularly on end-time events and the end of the world.

Although Bible students may differ somewhat on the precise point where the dividing line should be placed, serious study by Adventist scholars such as Kenneth A. Strand (*Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 2nd ed., 1979), C. M. Maxwell (*God Cares*, vol. 2, 1985), and W. H. Shea (various articles in *Andrews University Seminary Studies*) fully confirm this literary division and its consequent effect on interpretation.

2. The series of the seals and of the trumpets occur in the historical section of Revelation. Consequently their fulfillment should be sought for in historical time, the Christian Era.

3. The prophecies of the seals and of the trumpets have only one prophetic fulfillment.

a. The Daniel model of apocalyptic prophecy is clear on this point: Each metal, beast, and horn has only one fulfillment. (Even the "little horn" of Daniel 8, used as a symbol for Rome in its two phases, has only one fulfillment: Rome.) There is no contextual evidence that the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation should be given dual/multiple fulfillments. This latter proposition was examined at length and rejected by the Sanctuary Review Committee (representatives from the world divisions) in 1980 (see "Statement on Desmond Ford Document," *Ministry*, October 1980). The Daniel and Revelation Committee has likewise rejected it (see "Fulfillments of Prophecy," *The Seventy Weeks, Leviticus, and the Nature of Prophecy*, pp. 288–322). Dual/multiple fulfillments of Daniel/Revelation also fail to find support in Ellen White (see Biblical Research Institute tract, "Ellen G. White and the Interpretation of Daniel and Revelation").

b. Dual fulfillment may be present in some general/classical prophecies in which there are contextual markers indicating such—for example, the prophecy of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Joel 2; the prophecy of the virgin birth, Isaiah 7. But no such markers are present in the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation.

c. In regard to the trumpets, Revelation itself makes an end-time application of the *language* of the trumpets in its description of the seven last plagues. It is therefore an unnecessary pressing of these scriptures to place both the trumpets and the plagues in a simultaneous post-probation fulfillment.

The Seals—Revelation 4:1–8:1

The committee agrees on the following:

I. Setting

1. Revelation 4–5 is a unit, describing the same scene (Rev 4:2; 5:1).

2. Revelation 4–5 portrays a throne scene in the heavenly sanctuary (cf. Rev 4:3; 8:3).

3. The emphasis of the throne scene is upon Christ's atoning death, His accomplishment at the cross (Rev 5:6, 9, 12).

4. The throne scene is *not* the investigative judgment of Daniel 7:9, 10.

a. The Revelation scene is not designated a judgment; the Daniel scene is (Dan 7:10, 26).

b. The Revelation scene has only one book: It is in the Father's hand; it is closed and sealed; no being in the universe except the Lamb can open it; the book is never opened in the vision. By contrast, in the Daniel scene there are two or more books. They are open, and it is implied that they were opened for the Ancient of days by the attending holy beings (Dan 7:10).

II. Time Frame

1. The throne scene stands at the commencement of the Christian Era.

a. John is shown (by the sequential opening of the seals) "things which must be hereafter" (Rev 4:1; cf. Rev 1:1, 19).

b. The Father's throne (Rev 4), the overcoming of Christ (Rev 5:5), and His joining the Father at His throne (vs. 6; cf. Rev 3:21) are central themes in this throne scene (Rev 4 and 5). The victorious redeemed join the throne scene in Revelation 7 (vss. 9, 10). Between these two throne scenes lie the seal events of Revelation 6. Thus the seals of Revelation 6 are to be located between the cross victory of Christ and the victory of the redeemed, that is, in the Christian Era.

III. General Observations on the Seals

1. The imagery of the four horses and their colors is drawn from Zechariah 1:8–11; 6:1–6; 10:3, but is employed by John to symbolize a different message than that conveyed by Zechariah.

2. The seals are sequential, representing succeeding events across the Christian Era. This is evidenced by the order of the vision: The seals are broken one after another, not all at the same time (Rev 6:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12; 8:1).

3. The seals offer a general progression of history rather than a detailed chronology; their interpretation, therefore, is not bound specifically to the prophecy of the seven churches.

4. The seals are a parallel development of Matthew 24 and 25 (the Synoptic apocalypse). This link is another evidence for their fulfillment in the Christian Era.

a. Preaching of the gospel (Matt 24:14).	a. First seal: white horse (Rev 6:2).
b. Wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes (vss. 6–8).	b. Second through fourth seals: war, famine, pestilence (vss. 3–8).
c. Period of great tribulation/persecution (vs. 21).	c. Fifth seal: cry of martyrs to be avenged (vss. 9–11).
d. Signs in sun, moon, stars (vs. 29).	d. Sixth seal: great earthquake; signs in sun, moon, stars (vss. 12, 13).
e. Second Coming (vss. 30, 31).	e. Sixth seal: "the great day of his wrath is come" (vss. 14–17).
f. Judgment (Matt 25:31–46).	f. Seventh seal: "silence in heaven" (Rev 8:1); possibly millennial or executive phases of the final judgment (Rev 20:4, 11–15).

5. While there are similarities between the seals and the Synoptic apocalypse, there are also differences. In some instances the symbolism appears to extend the meaning beyond a simple repetition of Matthew 24. For example:

a. If the first seal symbolizes, initially, the apostolic outreach with the gospel (cf. Zech 10:3), then the changing colors of the horses (white, red, black, pale/green) suggest progressively deepening apostasy.

b. The physical signs such as war, famine, and pestilence would be transmuted by the symbolism to portray the additional features God's people would have to live through: unrest because of religious differences, famine for God's truth, severe persecutions of Christians by Christians.

c. Since Christian apostasy appears to be present in the second through fourth seals, the unhappy events depicted in these seals may reflect the imagery of the covenant woes/curses predicted to occur when the covenant is broken (Lev 26:14–39).

6. While each of the first four seals has an initial beginning, the action once begun may continue on with varying degrees of intensity.

a. First seal: Although begun by the apostles, the preaching of the gospel continues across the era. The martyrs under the fifth seal are told that more will yet be killed (Rev 6:11).

b. Apocalyptic models for this kind of symbolism: (1) The influence of the four beasts lingers after an initial sequential rule (Dan 7:12); (2) the sequential messages of the three angels continue on after their initial announcement (Rev 14:6–12).

7. The first seal represents the gospel message beginning in the first century (Rev 6:2). The fifth seal represents the persecutions of the Middle Ages (vss. 9–11). The sixth seal relates to the signs of Christ's second coming (vss. 12–17). The seventh seal relates to some event of cosmic significance after the Second Coming (8:1).

8. The sealing activity of Revelation 7:1–8 is included in the time frame of the sixth seal and is the response to the question "The great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" (Rev 6:17).

9. The great earthquake and the signs of the sun, moon, and stars of the sixth seal are literal, and the sixth seal opens with the Lisbon earthquake.

10. The celestial signs in the sixth seal may have natural/physical causes (cf. opening of the Red Sea, Exod 14:21); nevertheless, they are significant events because they occur at the right time in connection with the close of the 1260-year period of papal supremacy and persecution (cf. Mark 13:24).

The Trumpets—Revelation 8:2–11:17

The committee agrees that:

1. The trumpets are sequential, as evidenced by their occurring one after another in the vision.

2. The trumpets appear as warnings or announcements of adverse events to come (cf. Num 10:1–10).

3. A particular trumpet event may occupy an extensive period of time (Rev 9:5, 15; 10:7).

4. Revelation 10:1–11:14 is an interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpets (just as Revelation 7 is an interlude between the sixth and seventh seals) and belongs under the sixth trumpet (other than the flashback to the 1260-year period [Rev 11:3]).

5. The trumpet events occur in historical, probationary time.

a. Introduction (Rev 8:2–6): Functioning as an announcement of the upcoming seven trumpets, verses 2 and 6 are markers to form a literary inclusion around the two processes described in verses 3–5:

(1) The ongoing intercessory ministry of Christ (vss. 3, 4).

(2) The cessation of Christ's intercessory ministry and the close of human probation (vs. 5; cf. Ezek 10:1–7).

This literary device, an inclusion-introduction, definitely ties the trumpet event series to the era of Christ's high priestly intercession, probationary time.

b. Seventh trumpet: The sounding of the seventh trumpet is linked with the finishing of "the mystery of God" (Rev 10:7). "The mystery of God" is the gospel and its proclamation (Eph 3:4; 6:19; Col 4:3; Rom 16:25, 26). If the seventh trumpet is tied to the closing up of the gospel work, the gospel dispensation, then the preceding six trumpets must of necessity sound during probationary time.

c. Golden altar: Reference to the golden altar of incense at the commencement of the sixth trumpet is a marker in the prophecy, indicating that Christ's priestly intercession is still in process (Rev 9:13; cf. 8:3, 4).

d. Interlude (see No. 4 in this section): Gospel work is carried on under the sixth trumpet.

(1) The church (symbolized by John) is to preach "again [to] many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings" (Rev 10:11).

(2) People can repent and give glory to God (Rev 11:13; cf. 16:9).

e. Time periods: The presence of time periods in the fifth and sixth trumpets are markers indicating that these trumpets appear in historical time before the close of human probation.

Chapter X

Seals and Trumpets: Some Current Discussions

Jon Paulien

Editorial Synopsis. In recent years Adventist scholarship has focused on the literary structure of the book of Revelation. These studies have confirmed the Adventist pioneer consensus that the fulfillments of the parallel lines of the prophecy (namely, the seven churches, seven seals, and seven trumpets) extended across the Christian Era, beginning in John's day and reaching to the Second Coming.

Today some are arguing for two distinct fulfillments of the seals and trumpets (and other portions of Revelation, including the time periods). They see a *second* (primary for them) end-time fulfillment both of the seals and trumpets, commonly linking the former to the investigative judgment of Daniel 7. The trumpets are placed either in the end-time just prior to the Second Coming, or immediately after the close of probationary time.

In this chapter the writer summarizes the evidence embedded in the introductions to these series as well as in the sanctuary patterns and festivals reflected in the book. The collected data, he affirms, clearly endorses the correctness of the pioneer historicist view that these series extend across the Christian Age and were never intended (as whole series) to find a second fulfillment at the end of the age.

Chapter Outline

I. Current Issues
II. The "Grand Strategy" of Revelation
III. Historicism and the Seven Seals
IV. Historicism and the Seven Trumpets
V. Conclusions

Current Issues

Pioneer Consensus

Toward the end of the last century leading Seventh-day Adventist Bible students arrived at a consensus on how to apply the various parts of the book of Revelation to the history of the Christian Era.

They understood the letters to the seven churches (Rev 1–3) to be addressed initially to seven first-century churches over which John had a supervisory interest. The meaning of these letters extended as well (by symbolic representation) to the seven major periods of Christian history.

Seventh-day Adventist pioneers understood the seals, the trumpets, and chapter 12 (Rev 4–12) to offer three parallel lines covering the entire Christian Era. (1) The seven seals paralleled the seven churches as an outline of the major periods of Christian history. (2) The seven trumpets contained primarily the judgments of God upon the Western and Eastern portions of the Roman Empire. (3) Chapter 12 depicted the great controversy in heaven and its outworking in the experience of the church on earth.

The pioneers also agreed that the bulk of the events described in chapters 13–19 concerned the end-time, leading up to the second coming of Christ. Revelation 20–22, on the other hand, was seen to fall beyond the Second Coming.

Historic Adventism, therefore, came to agree that the book of Revelation divided naturally into two parts. The first covered major events of prophetic history between the two advents of Christ, though each series led up to the end. This interpretive approach to Revelation 1–12, known as historicism, was based on the mode of Daniel and of Jesus Himself to portray the future in terms of a series of historical events leading from the time of the prophet to the establishment of the eternal kingdom.[1]

The second division of Revelation was understood to cover primarily the events connected with the Second Advent itself. Although followed in exact detail by few today, *Daniel and Revelation*, by Uriah Smith, continues as an expression of this basic consensus hammered out about a hundred years ago by our spiritual forebears.[2]

New Interpretations Advanced by Some

In recent years several Seventh-day Adventists have explored the possibility that the end-time perspective of Revelation might be much broader than Adventists have thought. By and large, these interpreters agree with the historic consensus regarding the churches (Rev 1–3) and the latter half of the book (Rev 13–22).

However, they commonly argue for a *second* future fulfillment of certain portions of Revelation including their time periods. A major point of disagreement lies in how the seals and the trumpets (Rev 4–11) are to be understood. These "end-time interpreters"[3] believe that the seals and trumpets (Rev 4–11) portray events associated with the end-time rather than with the overall sweep of the Christian Era. The seals (Rev 4–6) are usually understood to portray aspects of the investigative judgment that began in 1844, and the trumpets (Rev 8–11) are understood to follow the close of probation just before the return of Christ. For some, these are viewed as *second* fulfillments.

What has emerged from their studies and ensuing discussions is the realization that Seventh-day Adventists have not invested the kind of creative energy upon the seals and trumpets that would enable the historicist position, or any other position, to be declared firmly established. Adventists have tended to assume that the seals and trumpets are two historical series, extending from the prophet's day to the end, but have not established that viewpoint on the basis of careful exegesis of the text.[4] Whether the emerging end-time interpretations of the seals and the trumpets prove to be correct, the authors of these interpretations have stimulated study by drawing attention to these more obscure portions of Revelation.

Although an understanding of the seals and trumpets may not be critical to salvation, current realities require that they be given more careful attention than has been the case in the past. This chapter, therefore, attempts to describe a number of realities in the book of Revelation that need to be taken into account when addressing how the seals and the trumpets are to be interpreted.

The "Grand Strategy" of Revelation

Function of the Literary Arrangement

A major piece of evidence cited in defense of a historicist understanding of the seals and trumpets is based on the observation that the book of Revelation is structured as a "chiasm."[5] A "chiastic structure" occurs when words and ideas parallel each other in reverse order from the beginning to the end of a book.

In the case of Revelation, the material before Revelation 15 is, on the whole, paralleled in reverse by the material coming after chapter 15. Kenneth Strand considers the first (and larger) half to be concerned with the entire Christian Age. The content of Revelation following chapter 15 concerns almost exclusively the time after the close of earth's probation, an event that still lies in the future. The "chiasm" and its results are self-evident when one compares the first three chapters of Revelation with the last two.[6] End-time interpreters, however, have resisted this understanding of the literary arrangement of Revelation, since it impacts negatively on their interpretations of the seals and trumpets.

I have sought to clarify the applicability of Kenneth Strand's outline to the seals and the trumpets by carefully comparing chapters 4–7 with chapter 19, as Strand suggests. I found, in the original language, four clusters of parallel ideas between the seals and chapter 19, two of which bear directly on the issue at hand.[7]

1. In chapters 4 and 5, the worship scenes depict praise offered to God for Creation and the cross. However, parallel scenes in chapters 7 and 19 depict praise to God for redeeming His people from end-time Babylon. This observation suggests that the best placement of chapters 4 and 5 is at the beginning of the Christian Era.

2. Revelation 6:10 depicts a time when God is "not yet judging." Revelation 19:2 comes after the judgment is completed. The judgment does not take place in chapters 4 and 5 when the seals have yet to be opened. It is obvious that the judgment must occur sometime between the opening of the fifth seal (in which the martyrs call for judgment) and the pronouncement of judgment completed in Revelation 19:2.

These two observations coincide with what one would expect if the first part of Revelation concerns the whole Christian Age and the latter part the end-time.

Function of the Sanctuary in Revelation

Introductory sanctuary scenes. Research has uncovered a series of indications that John himself understood the seals and the trumpets to cover the broad sweep of Christian history rather than the end-time alone. For example, the sanctuary scenes that introduce various parts of Revelation[8] demonstrate a significant progression.

The first sanctuary scene (1:12–20). Here the vision uses sanctuary imagery to portray Christ's presence among the churches on earth; however, it is not a glimpse into the heavenly sanctuary. The scene occurs on Patmos itself, and the seven lampstands represent the seven churches. The explicit invitation to "come up" to the heavenly realm comes later in Revelation 4:1.

The second sanctuary scene (4:1–5:14). The focus now shifts to the sanctuary in heaven. The largest collection of sanctuary imagery in the book is found in this introduction to the seals. The scene contains a thorough mix of imagery from nearly every aspect of the Hebrew cultus.

In the Israelite sanctuary on earth only two occasions touched base with nearly every aspect of its worship: the inauguration service at which time the sanctuary was dedicated (cf. Exod 40) and the Day of Atonement.

The sanctuary scene in chapters 4–5 is the first view of the heavenly sanctuary in the book. It is best identified with the inauguration or dedication service of the ancient sanctuary. The central focus is on the consequences of the cross, one of which was the establishment of Christ's reign in the heavenly sanctuary.

The portrayal is definitely not a judgment scene as one might expect if the Day of Atonement were in view. In fact, the explicit language of judgment is totally absent from the scene.[9] The only time a Greek word for judging appears in the first half of the book is in Revelation 6:10, and there the assertion is that God has not yet begun to judge! Since the sanctuary scene in Revelation 5 precedes the opening of the seals, the evidence that the fifth seal occurs in a time of "not judging" is decisive in locating the seals in the general Christian Era.

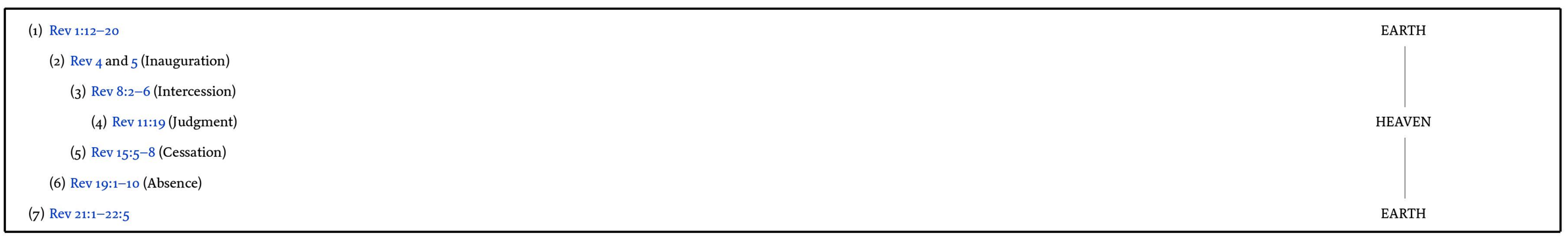
The third and fourth sanctuary scenes (8:2–6 and 11:19). These continue in the heavenly sanctuary. The former (8:2–6) presents an explicit view of the first apartment with its services of intercession. The latter (11:19) portrays an explicit view of the Second Apartment in the context of judgment (cf. 11:18).

The fifth sanctuary scene (15:5–8). This view takes up the language of inauguration again (glory filling the temple), but actually portrays a shutting down of the sanctuary, its de-inauguration or cessation of its ministry.

The sixth sanctuary scene (19:1–10). The language of *throne, worship*, and *Lamb* is characteristic of the second scene, but all explicit sanctuary images are absent. The heavenly sanctuary has faded from view.

The seventh sanctuary scene (21:1–22:5). The focus of the vision returns to earth, the counterpart to chapter 1. The Lord God and the Lamb are the temple of the Holy City (21:22). God is now with His people on earth (21:3).

These introductory sanctuary scenes show two definite lines of progression. First, the reader's attention is drawn from earth to heaven, and back again to earth. Secondly, he is led from the inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary to intercession, to judgment, to the sanctuary's cessation, and finally to its absence. This progression is illustrated below.



In this progression the first explicit day of atonement-judgment scene takes place only in 11:18, 19. The first half of the book focuses on inauguration and intercession; the latter half moves to judgment and rejection. This is supportive of the pioneer consensus and Kenneth Strand's basic insight that the book of Revelation is divided into historical and eschatological halves.

The daily/yearly pattern. When the book of Revelation as a whole is examined in the light of the sanctuary, discoveries of a more implicit nature are made. From historical sources we have become familiar with the way the daily and yearly services of the sanctuary were carried on in the century when Revelation was written. A comparison of Revelation 1–8 with these sources suggests that this section of Revelation reflects the daily services of the sanctuary that foreshadowed the cross.[10]

The first major act in the daily (*tāmîḏ*) sacrificial service of the Temple was for a selected priest to enter the holy place and trim the lampstand, making sure that each of the lamps was burning brightly and had a fresh supply of oil (cf. Rev 1:12–20). Following this ministry the great door of the Temple was left open (cf. Rev 4:1). Then a lamb was slain (cf. Rev 5:6) and its blood poured out at the base of the altar of burnt offering in the outer court of the Temple (cf. Rev 6:9). After the pouring out of the blood, incense was offered at the golden altar in the holy place (cf. Rev 8:3–4; Luke 1:8–10). Then during a break in the singing (cf. Rev 8:1) the trumpets were blown to indicate that the sacrifice was complete (cf. Rev 8:2, 6).

Not only does the first part of Revelation reflect all the major details of the daily sacrifice in the Temple, but also it alludes to them essentially in the same order. Thus, the material making up the churches, seals, and trumpets appears to be subtly associated with the activities in the Temple related to the daily (*tāmîḏ*) service. Seventh-day Adventists understand these daily services to be typical of the intercessory phase of Christ's ministry begun in the heavenly sanctuary at the time of His ascension in A.D. 31. The fact that the introductory scenes to the seals and the trumpets are associated with sanctuary inauguration and intercession is certainly compatible with this finding.

It is interesting, therefore, to find in chapter 11 that the book moves to the explicit language of the yearly services of the Day of Atonement. Kenneth Strand has pointed out that Revelation 11:1–2 contains a strong allusion to the Day of Atonement, which comes immediately after a reference to the completion of the time prophecies of Daniel (Rev 10:5, 6).[11] In Leviticus 16—the major Day of Atonement chapter—atonement is made for the high priest, the sanctuary, the altar, and the people. The only other place in Scripture where the terms *sanctuary, altar*, and *people* are combined is in Revelation 11:1–2. Since the NT High Priest, Jesus Christ, needs no atonement, the common reference to *sanctuary, altar*, and *people* being measured appears to be a deliberate recollection of the Day of Atonement as the day when these were evaluated or "measured" (cf. 2 Sam 8:2; Matt 7:2). This subtle Day of Atonement allusion comes just prior to the more explicit one of Revelation 11:18–19.

In conclusion, we may infer that the daily/yearly pattern embedded in the sanctuary imagery of Revelation suggests that the first portion of the book (Rev 1–10) was written with the intercessory ministry of Christ in mind. In the eleventh chapter, imagery related to the daily services is replaced by allusions to the judgment-oriented ministry of the Day of Atonement. This is what we would expect if the first half of the book focuses primarily on the large events of the Christian Age and the latter half on the final events of that age when judgment will bring sin and sinners to an end.

Annual feasts in Revelation. Equally striking is the evidence that the book of Revelation appears to be patterned also after the annual feasts of the Jewish year.[12]

Passover. The letters to the seven churches are reminiscent of the Passover, the primary feast of the spring season. For example, nowhere else in Revelation are there such strong concentrations of references to Christ's death and resurrection (cf. Rev 1:5, 17–18).[13] Christ's intense scrutiny of the churches reminds us of each Jewish household's search for leaven to remove it just before Passover (Exod 12:19; 13:7). Since Passover is the only festival fulfilled by the earthly Christ (1 Cor 5:7), it is fitting that it would be associated with that portion of the book where He is portrayed in His ministry to the churches on earth.

Pentecost. As the inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary, the throne-scene of Revelation 4–5 is fittingly associated with Pentecost. The first Pentecost took place during the time when the law was given to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exod 19–20). As the new Moses, Christ receives, as it were, the new Torah from God (Rev 5). Exodus 19 also involved the inauguration of Israel as the people of God (Exod 19:5–6; cf. Rev 5:9–10). The Jewish liturgy for the feast of Pentecost included the reading of not only Exodus 19 but also of Ezekiel 1, a major literary background to Revelation 4–5.

Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement. The blowing of seven trumpets—near the center of the book (Rev 8–9, 11)—reminds the reader of the seven monthly new moon feasts that climaxed in the Feast of Trumpets, marking the transition between the spring and fall feasts. The Feast of Trumpets itself, falling on the first day of the seventh month (corresponding to the seventh trumpet) ushered in the time of judgment that led up to the Day of Atonement (cf. 11:18–19). There is an increasing focus on the concept of judgment from that point on in the book.[14]

Feast of Tabernacles. The last of the five basic feasts of the Levitical system (cf. Lev 23) was the Feast of Tabernacles that followed the Day of Atonement. Harvest was over (cf. Rev 14–20). God was now "tabernacling" with His people (Rev 21:3). The end-time celebrations of Revelation are filled with images of feasting, palm branches, music, and rejoicing before the Lord.[15] The primary images of the Feast—water and light—find their ultimate fulfillment in Revelation 22:1, 5.

Within Adventism, the spring feasts have been associated with the cross of Christ and His inauguration and ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. The fall feasts find their fulfillment in the time of the end and in the preadvent judgment and events surrounding the second coming of Christ. What has been overlooked is the fact that the Feast of Trumpets comes as the climax of seven new moon feasts (Num 10:10) and forms the bridge between the spring and the fall feasts. It is, therefore, in the seven trumpets of Revelation that one finds the chronological bridge between the spring and fall feasts, between a focus on the cross and the beginning of the Christian Age, and a focus on the end-time in Revelation.

Thus, the first half of Revelation, based on the daily sacrifices and the spring feasts, offers an emphasis on the cross and its effects; while the latter half of the book, based on the yearly sacrifices and the fall feasts, focuses on the end. The Feast of Trumpets (the first day of the seventh month) introduced the time of the year in which judgment took place and the sanctuary was cleansed (Rev 11:18–19).

Summary

The above material on the sanctuary background of Revelation indicates that Kenneth Strand's chiasm is well supported by broad trends that span the book of Revelation as a whole. These trends suggest that John understood the seals and trumpets to cover the entire span of Christian history from his day until the Second Advent (however long John understood that to be). The main point of difference with Strand concerns whether the center point of the book is Revelation 11–12 or 14–15.

This matter is not, however, a substantive difference. The material in Revelation 12–14 is transitional. Its goal and focus is on the final wrath of the nations against the remnant (12:17; 13). But it spends much time recapitulating the history that would lead up to that climax, setting the stage for the final operations of characters that have been functioning for much of the era. Beginning with chapter 15 the nearly exclusive focus is on the very end of the end-time.

Historicism and the Seven Seals

Space does not permit a point-for-point response to the arguments of those who feel that the prophecy of the seals (Rev 4–8) are intended to portray the events of the end-time.[16] The most crucial biblical argument for this position, however, grows out of two observations: (1) It is clear that Revelation 4 and 5 contain parallels to Daniel 7, Ezekiel 1–10, and Revelation 19. Since judgment is the primary theme of these parallel passages, it is inferred that the scene in Revelation 4–5 must be that of the investigative judgment beginning in 1844. (2) It is also clear that some of the imagery in Revelation 4–5 recalls aspects of the services on the Day of Atonement.[17] Thus, it may be assumed that the entire scene is a Day of Atonement portrayal. These arguments certainly merit investigation, but they do not overturn the larger picture outlined briefly above.

For one thing, the parallels to Ezekiel and Daniel are informative but do not tell the entire story. The Revelator alludes to other major passages in the OT as well.[18] The common denominator among all five OT passages is not judgment but a description of God's throne. In fact, John selects throne room imagery from Daniel 7 and Ezekiel 1–10 but avoids employing their judgment aspects.[19]

Especially striking are the strong differences between Revelation 4–5 and Daniel 7. In Daniel thrones are set up (Dan 7:9); in Revelation the thrones are already there (Rev 4:2–4). In Daniel many books are open (Dan 7:10); in Revelation one book is sealed (Rev 5:1). In Daniel the central figure is "the son of man" (Dan 7:13; a term the Revelator is certainly familiar with—1:13); in Revelation it is the Lamb (Rev 5:6; a term more appropriate to the daily service than to the Day of Atonement in any case).

As noted above, the language of judgment in the scene of Revelation 4–5 is totally absent[20] until 6:10 where it is clear that judgment hasn't yet begun. It seems inconceivable that Revelation 4–5 could be the end-time judgment scene when that judgment has not yet begun even by the time the fifth seal is opened!

While there are a few allusions to the sanctuary in Revelation 4–5 that can be related to the Day of Atonement, there are many more that relate to other aspects of the sanctuary and its services. The overall impression given by this passage does not pertain to any one apartment or service but suggests a comprehensive listing of nearly every aspect of the ancient ministry.

The above series of observations regarding the sanctuary in the literary structure of Revelation strongly indicate that Revelation 4–5 is a symbolic description of the inauguration service in the heavenly sanctuary that took place in A.D. 31. What follows the inauguration scene has to do with the entire Christian Age, not just its end.

Recent attempts to locate Revelation 4 in the first apartment of the heavenly sanctuary and Revelation 5 in the Second Apartment founder upon the absolute lack of evidence in the text for any movement of the throne between the two chapters. The two chapters depict a single visionary location.

Historicism and the Seven Trumpets

The arguments for an end-time interpretation of the trumpet series (Rev 8–11) are somewhat more impressive than those offered for the seals series. It is argued that the throwing down of the censer (Rev 8:5) depicts the close of probation. Thus, the trumpet series that follows (8:7ff.) must find fulfillment after the close of probation. Further evidence for a post-probation fulfillment is to be seen in the fact that the objects destroyed by the first two trumpets—the earth, sea, and trees—are not to be hurt until after the sealing of chapter seven is complete (Rev 7:1–3). The third piece of evidence for a postprobation interpretation of the trumpets is the fact that the locust/scorpion plague of the fifth trumpet is not permitted to affect the sealed, thus suggesting a setting after the close of probation (Rev 9:4).

These arguments, of course, fly directly in the face of the above evidence that John had a concern for the Christian Age as a whole in the first half of Revelation and only focused specifically on the end-time in the latter half of the book. Under closer examination, however, it becomes evident that the arguments for a post-probation setting for the trumpets are based more on assumptions rather than on the actual evidence of the biblical text.

Introductory Sanctuary Scene: Revelation 8:2–6

The major assumption that lies behind the first argument is that the introductory sanctuary scene that depicts symbolically Christ's priestly ministry of intercession is concluded before the trumpets begin. Thus, the throwing down of the censer (the close of human probation) precedes the events that follow in the chapter. As a result, all seven trumpets are understood to come after the close of probation.

The assumption that the introductory scene is concluded before the trumpets begin can be tested in two ways. First, Do the other introductory scenes (preceding the seven churches, the seven seals, and the seven bowls) conclude before each sevenfold series begins? Or do they continue to remain in the background of the entire visionary sequence? Second, If the trumpets largely take place during probationary time, what evidence is there in the series to indicate that probation is still open to humanity?

When we examine the introductory scenes to the sevenfold visions of Revelation, we discover that they not only precede the subsequent scenes but remain in view throughout. For example, in the seven churches the introductory vision precedes the letters in the literary arrangement of the book, but each letter refers back to the characteristics of Christ listed in that introduction. Since the letters are written in ordinary prose, they provide a clear indication of the author's literary strategy.

The seven seals are each opened during the Lamb's continued activity in the heavenly throne room (Rev 5–6). That scene, beginning with the inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary, continues through the breaking of the seals to the Second Coming and on to the time when all creation praises God (Rev 5:13).

The introductory scene to the seven bowls (Rev 15:5–8) portrays an empty tabernacle in heaven, which is certainly fitting for the entire period after the close of probation.

Thus, each introductory vision provides the setting for the subsequent activity and remains active in the background right up to the conclusion of the vision. Since this is so clearly the case for three of the four sevenfold visions, the burden of proof is on anyone who wishes to argue that Revelation 8:2–6 is an exception. It is more likely that John intended the reader to see the intercession at the golden altar as being available right up to the instant the seventh trumpet blows, leading to the finishing of the "mystery of God" (Rev 10:7), that is, the closing up of the gospel (Rom 16:25–27; Eph 3:2–7; 6:19).

Other Evidences of Probationary Time

The above is supported by abundant evidence that probation remains open through the sixth trumpet. The sixth trumpet is equated with the second woe and as such clearly runs from Revelation 9:12 to 11:14. In Revelation 9:13 there is a voice "from the four horns of the golden altar before God," a clear reference to the golden altar of Revelation 8:3, 4. This suggests that intercession is still in process at the time the sixth trumpet is blown.

In Revelation 9:20, 21 those who experience the plague of the sixth trumpet fail to repent, which may indicate that repentance is still an option.

In Revelation 10:11 the prophet learns that he must prophesy again, something that would make little sense after the close of probation.

But most important, a group of people described in Revelation 11:13 as the "rest" or "remainder" (*hoi loipoi*—the same word applied to the remnant of Revelation 12:17)[21] "were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven." Whatever point in history we may take this to be, it is clearly an appropriate response to the gospel proclaimed by the first angel of Revelation 14:6, 7—"Fear God and give him glory."[22]

Thus it is evident that probation remains open, and the intercession of Revelation 8:3, 4 continues until the end of the sixth trumpet. The seven trumpets as a whole are clearly not understood to be after the close of probation.

Are the Trumpets Sequential to the Sealing (Rev 7)?

A further argument for an end-time interpretation of the seven trumpets notes the similarity in language between Revelation 7:1–3 and Revelation 8:7–9. According to Revelation 7 the earth, sea, and trees are not to be hurt until the sealing work is completed. Since these are the very objects affected by the first and second trumpets, it is suggested that these trumpets must follow the sealing chronologically and, thus, occur in post-probationary times.

However, it should be noted that Revelation 8:2 introduces a new series; consequently, it is necessary to demonstrate that the trumpet series follows *chronologically* the literary section that precedes it. Chapters 4 and 12 certainly go back to an earlier stage of history. Why not chapter 8 as well?

Although it is true that the objects for destruction in the first two trumpets are protected in Revelation 7:1–3, they are also protected in the fifth trumpet (Rev 9:4). This fact raises serious questions whether the trumpet series is to be related as an immediate sequel to the vision of chapter 7.

Even more decisive, however, is the fact that the strongest parallel between the first part of Revelation 7 and the seven trumpets is in Revelation 9:14, 16. In both sections binding and loosing are related to four angels. In both sections a people are being numbered: in Revelation 7 the people of God; in Revelation 9 their demonic counterparts. And these are the only two places in Revelation containing the cryptic words, "I heard the number [*ēkousa ton arithmon*]." If probation remains open through the sixth trumpet and then closes with the sounding of the seventh, the sixth trumpet is the exact historical counterpart of Revelation 7:1–8. It is the last opportunity for salvation just before the end.

The seven trumpets, therefore, do not follow the events of Revelation 7 in chronological order. The trumpets take their cue and commencement, instead, from the introductory vision of Revelation 8:2–6. The main theme of that vision is intercession at the altar of incense. This is an appropriate follow-up to the inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary as described in Revelation 5.

The book of Revelation flows naturally, as shown above, from a view of the cross[23] to a view of the inauguration of Christ's ministry in the light of the cross (Rev 5), to a picture of the intercessory ministry that results (Rev 8:3, 4), and ultimately to the judgment that precedes the end (Rev 11:18, 19). This order of events is characteristic of the entire NT.

Seal of God (Rev 9:4)

The final major argument for an end-time interpretation of the trumpets rests on the observation that the fifth trumpet does not affect those who are sealed (Rev 9:4). It is argued that if the sealing is the last event before the close of probation, then the events of the fifth trumpet must occur after the close of probation. This argument, however, assumes a number of points that need to be demonstrated. It assumes that "sealing" means exactly the same in both contexts. It assumes that "sealing" is limited to the end-time. It assumes that Ellen White's views on the sealing in Revelation 7:1–3 apply also to Revelation 9:4.

If one approaches Revelation 9:4 within the larger NT context, these assumptions are difficult to sustain. The Greek words for sealing (*sphragis*, *sphragizō*) are multiple in meaning. For example, when a seal is placed on a document, message, or tomb its purpose may be to conceal or to confine.[24] An alternative meaning is to certify that something or someone is reliable.[25] But when related to God's people, the predominant meaning of sealing is ownership and acceptance by God ("the Lord knows those who are his").[26] In this sense it was a present reality already in the time of Abraham (Rom 4:11).

If in a given passage the context indicates that we are *prior* to the close of probation, the concept of a sealed people must be understood in the general sense of those who belong to God in any age. Thus, it should not be assumed that the sealing in Revelation 7:1–3 is identical necessarily with that of Revelation 9:4.

It should also not be assumed that the sealing of Revelation 7:1–3 is limited to the end-time. Revelation 7:1–3 does not explicitly limit the sealing to the end-time; it merely focuses on the significance of sealing work in an end-time setting. Related to this is the observation that whatever Ellen White understood by Revelation 7:1–3, she never quotes Revelation 9:4 in an end-time context, thus it is unwise to assume what she herself never stated.

Summary

It is, therefore, clear that the arguments many have utilized to place the trumpets in an end-time setting do not carry the weight necessary to overturn the larger perspective outlined in the first part of this chapter that the trumpets cover the entire Christian Age.

Conclusions

In this brief chapter we have combined a number of textual observations to demonstrate that the prophet John had two great perspectives in mind when he wrote out his visions. In the first half of the book he focused on the Christian Era as a whole, moving from his time to the end. In the second half of the book he delineated primarily the events of the end.

This insight parallels the pattern of the other two great "apocalyptic" passages of the NT: Matthew 24 (and its parallels, Luke 21; Mark 13) and 2 Thessalonians 2. Each of these passages contains a section that focuses first on the Christian Age as a whole.[27] These sections are followed then by special attention to the climax at the end.[28] Thus the book of Revelation, rightly understood, is in perfect harmony with the theology and literary practices of the NT, even though its language is quite unique.

The thrust of the evidence brought forth in this chapter is the recognition that the consensus of the Seventh-day Adventist pioneers on the seals and trumpets, though marred by some historical inaccuracies and limited exegetical insights, nevertheless was accurate in its perception that the seals and the trumpets were intended by John under inspiration to cover the entire Christian Age and not just the end of that age.

Chapter XI

The Seven Seals

Jon Paulien

Editorial Synopsis. As observed in the DARCOM Report (chapter 9 in this volume), the scenes portrayed on earth at the sequential breaking of the first six seals occur across the Christian Era. A throne scene in the heavenly sanctuary—Revelation's portrayal of the inauguration of Jesus at His ascension as a "Prince and a Saviour" at the Father's side (Acts 5:31, KJV)—is the historical setting for Christ's reception of the sealed scroll. From this point in time He begins to break the seals, one by one.

A major key for unlocking the symbolism in the book of Revelation is the imagery John draws from the OT to describe the content of his visions. The present writer provides a helpful tool in this respect by appending three tables of OT allusions that impact on the prophecy of the seals. A fourth table, comparing Revelation 6 with Jesus' apocalyptic sermon in the Gospels, is also included.

Although the sealed scroll is never opened in probationary time, its identity is important to the interpretation of this section of the general prophecy. The present writer suggests that the scroll should be understood as related to the book of Revelation itself. Thus, the scroll that the Father hands to the victorious Lamb to open and read (5:1–7) is the same as the "revelation" God gives to Christ of "things which must shortly come to pass" (1:1, KJV; cf. 1:19). In that case the scroll contains not only the history and destiny of the world and the church, but also God's plan to deliver His people and to resolve the moral controversy that has torn the unity of His creation.

The language of the seals contains strong allusions to the covenant curses or judgments that threatened Israel upon her rejection of God. At the same time the experiences occurring at the opening of each seal parallel in a striking manner the events foretold by our Lord on the Mount of Olives (Matt 24–25; Mark 13; Luke 21)—events that would take place prior to the fall of Jerusalem and prior to His return and the end of the world.

Thus, the successful preaching of the gospel (white horse) results not only in victories for the kingdom, but is followed by persecutions, divisions, and (for those who reject His grace, increasing spiritual famine and decline). The fifth seal records the cry of the martyrs for divine justice, whereas the sixth drops the symbolism, as it were, and sketches in bold strokes the events that point to the approaching great "day of the Lord."

While the prophecy of the seals briefly surveys the success and trials of the "church militant," it keeps present before the eye of faith the great truths that the Lamb of God, the Lion of Judah, has prevailed over the forces of evil at Calvary and is presently reigning with His Father. All things are under His control. In His hands is the destiny of humankind.

Chapter Outline

I. Introduction
II. General Exegesis
III. Introductory Sanctuary Scene
IV. Breaking the Seals
V. Tables of Allusions (1–4)

Introduction

In recent years the prophecy of the seven seals of Revelation has excited increasing interest among Seventh-day Adventist pastors and lay people. In this chapter we examine the major issues that arise from the text of Revelation 4–6. It is hoped that this brief introduction will stimulate careful analysis of the passage and provide guidance to future study. Since no interpretation of the seals has so decisively settled the issues as to be self-evident to all honest seekers, no interpretation of the seals (including this one) should become a center of theological controversy.

General Exegesis

The passage opens with an invitation to John to "come up" through an open door into heaven itself (4:1). There he is permitted to view the throne of God surrounded by the heavenly court (4:2–8). In a scene of unutterable praise and devotion (4:8–11), the "One sitting on the throne" is adored for His holiness and His role in the creation of all things.

The worship scene is interrupted by a moment of crisis. A scroll of great importance in the hand of the enthroned Monarch cannot be opened unless a "worthy" individual is found to break its seven seals (5:1–4). Christ, depicted as a "slain lamb" and pronounced worthy, presents Himself and takes the scroll from the right hand of the One sitting on the throne (5:5–7). This act calls forth an even greater crescendo of praise to both the Lamb and the One sitting on the throne (5:8–14). The impression is left that this is, perhaps, the most decisive moment in the history of the universe.

The scene now turns to the Lamb's successive breaking of the scroll's seven seals (6:1–17). While a sealed scroll cannot be read until all seals are broken, the action of breaking each seal triggers frightful events on earth. The breaking of the first four results in the appearance of riders on horses whose actions produce increasing disunity and distress upon the earth (6:1–8). The breaking of the fifth and sixth seals highlights the suffering of the martyrs and the cosmic signs that lead up to the end (6:9–17). The chapter concludes with a solemn question in the face of the great day of the wrath of God and the Lamb: What human being "can stand before it" (6:17)?

The answer is offered in chapter 7. When the winds of strife blow upon the earth, those marked on the forehead with the seal of the living God will be sheltered (7:1–3). These "standing ones" are described by a pair of images: 144,000 composed of 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel (7:4–8), and an innumerable multitude from every tribe on earth (7:9–17). Whether these two designations represent one group or two, they clearly portray the totality of those who are shielded from the great day of wrath. They join the heavenly court in praise (7:9–12) and in service before the throne (7:14–17).

Seals in Context

Statements of introduction and conclusion are of major importance in understanding any biblical book. It is particularly important, where Revelation is concerned. The prophet John has a technique of artfully embedding each of his introductory summaries in the preceding section, usually at the climactic spot.

For example, while the suffering of the souls under the altar (6:9–11) provides a pointed climax to the war, famine, and pestilence sequence of the four horsemen, the answer to their cry, "How long, O Lord?" awaits the plagues of the seven trumpets (cf. 8:3–5, 13). Likewise, the five central concepts of 11:18 become the ordering principle of chapters 12 through 22.[1] The third angel's message (14:9–12) climaxes God's response to the attack of the dragon and his allies. At the same time, however, the language points forward to 15:1 which introduces the bowl plagues. Revelation 21:1–8 functions as both the climax of the vision of the thousand years and as the introduction to the detailed description of the New Jerusalem.

Springboard passage: Revelation 3:21. The key to the larger significance of most portions of Revelation is, therefore, often located in a preceding climax statement. With that in mind, it should come as no surprise that the best starting point for a study of the seals and their context is Revelation 3:21. Although the passage functions as the climax of all the promises to the overcomer (Rev 2–3), its language provides a summary overview of the content of the seven seals:

> To the one who overcomes
> I will give the right to sit with me on my throne,
> *just as* I also overcame
> and sat down with my Father on His throne.[2]

In this text Christ promises to reward the *overcomer (ho nikōn)* with a share in His throne. An analogy to this action ("just as"—*hōs*) is the *overcoming (enikēsa)* of Christ that resulted in His joining the Father on His throne. From the standpoint of the prophet, the believer's overcoming is described as a present ongoing experience,[3] but their sitting on Christ's throne is future (*dōsō*). By way of contrast, both Christ's overcoming (*enikēsa*) and being seated (*ekathisa*) are specific past-time events.[4]

The Father's throne (4:2ff.), the overcoming of Christ (*enikēsen*, 5:5), and Christ's joining the Father on His throne (5:6ff.) are the central themes of Revelation 4 and 5. Not until Revelation 7 are the redeemed explicitly permitted to join in the rejoicing and the worship of the heavenly court (7:9–12). Just as the reward of the saints is related to Christ's in Revelation 3:21, so the two throne scenes of Revelation 5 and 7:9ff. are related, although equally separated chronologically.[5]

The introductory scene of the seals (Rev 4–5) is, therefore, an elaboration of the latter part of 3:21 (concerning Christ's overcoming and enthronement). The praise scene of 7:9–17 fulfills the promise that the overcomer will join Christ on His throne. Between the two throne scenes is chapter 6. Therefore, the seals of chapter 6 correspond to the assertion of 3:21 ("to the one who overcomes"); they span the time from the overcoming of the Lamb to the reward of the sealed.

The seals of chapter 6 have to do with the ongoing period in which God's people are in the process of overcoming. Since the many promises to the overcomer (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21) are offered to the seven churches of first-century Asia Minor, the period of their overcoming had already begun in John's day and will continue until all God's people have joined Jesus on His throne.

Location of the seals. What event did the prophet have in mind for the beginning point of the seals? The expressions "I *overcame*," "I *sat down*," "he *overcame*" provide markers to point us back to Christ's death, resurrection, and inauguration as High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary.[6] The cross-centered nature of this overcoming is confirmed by the "new song" of the four living creatures and the 24 elders (5:9):

> You are worthy to take the book and to open its seals
> because *you were slain*
> and *purchased* for God with your blood
> some from every tribe and language and people and nation
> and *made* them a kingdom and priests to our God
> and they will reign on the earth.

In this song the Greek tense of the verbs[7] refers back to the Christ-event and its consequences. It is the slain Lamb who, by means of His blood, purchases humanity and offers it a new status in Him. It is the cross that has made Christ "worthy" (5:2; cf. 5:9) to take up His work for our salvation in the heavenly sanctuary. It is the death of Christ that provides the basis for the believer's overcoming (12:11).

Since the events of Revelation 7 fall at the close of earth's history,[8] whereas the emphasis of the throne scene in Revelation 5 is on Christ's death, it is evident that Revelation 6 is a visionary description of events on earth *between* the cross and the Second Coming. There is a particular focus on the gospel of Jesus Christ and on the people who accept and proclaim that gospel.

Structural Parallels

It is essential for the interpreter of Revelation to be sensitive to the other parts of the book that may relate to the passage under study. In the book of Revelation the key to the meaning of one passage may lie at the opposite end of the prophecy.

Kenneth Strand has concluded that the first 14 chapters of the book function in chiastic parallel to the last eight chapters.[9] John's choice of language suggests to him that Revelation 4–7 is paralleled primarily by the material in Revelation 19 (although elements in 7:15–17 are closely related to 21:3, 4).[10] Building on Strand's work, I carefully compared the language of chapters 4–7 with that of chapter 19.[11] There appear to be four main clusters of parallel words and ideas.

Worship scenes. The first cluster involves the worship scenes. The only passages that combine the four living creatures, the 24 elders, God's throne, and scenes of praise and worship are found in Revelation 4, 5, 7, and 19.[12] Other common elements in these chapters include the words chosen to praise God[13] and the garments worn.[14]

In chapters 4 and 5, God and the Lamb are praised for their activity in Creation and at the cross (4:11; 5:9, 12). But in chapters 7 and 19 they are praised for redeeming the great multitude at the close of their tribulation (7:9–14) and for destroying great end-time Babylon (19:1–8). This confirms the position that the scene in Revelation 4–5 pertains primarily to the beginning of the Christian Era, but those of Revelation 7 and 19 focus on the end of that era.

Horse scenes. The second main cluster ties the activities of the four horsemen (6:1–8), particularly the first, with the horse and rider in 19:11–15. The common elements include the white horse, the crown, and the sword.[15] The most striking parallel is that of the white horse, a symbol appearing nowhere else in Revelation. The imagery in both cases has to do with conquest.

In 6:2, however, the Greek word for "crown" (*Stephanos*) implies a reward for victory. But the Greek word in 19:12 (*diadēmata*) indicates a royal crown, implying the right to rule.[16]

In its context (see below) 6:2 highlights the victory on the cross and its consequences, while 19:11–15 highlights the final conquest of evil at the second coming of Christ, when Christ literally takes over His kingdom. This parallel signals the move from establishing Christ's right to rule in heavenly places (chaps. 4–5) to demonstrating that right to rule on earth at His return (19:11–15).

The white horse of chapter 6 symbolizes the victory of Christ in the spread of His invisible kingdom through the preaching of the gospel. The white horse(s) of chapter 19 symbolizes the total subjugation of evil by Christ at His second coming.

Judgment. The third cluster of parallels connects the fifth seal (6:9–11) with Revelation 19:1, 2. The former is a call for judgment (*krineis*) and vengeance (*ekdikeis*) on those who dwell on the earth. The latter proclaims that judgment (*kriseis*, *ekrinen*) and vengeance (*exedikēsen*) have been carried out on Babylon, the end-time equivalent of those who tormented the martyrs throughout the Christian Era.

The time of judgment and vengeance mentioned in Revelation 19 does not refer directly to anything in the seals, but summarizes the explicit content of Revelation 18, which in turn builds on Revelation 17 and 14:8–11. Thus, the rise of end-time Babylon and its judgment and destruction fall between the time of the fifth seal and the proclamation of Revelation 19:2. Of the four main clusters of parallels between the seals and Revelation 19, the third is the most direct and comprehensive, with seven verbal parallels between 19:2 alone and 6:10–11 (ten if 19:1 is included).[17]

Day of wrath. Finally, the fourth cluster involves a parallel between those who are terrified on the day of wrath (6:15–17) and those who are consumed in God's end-time banquet (19:17–18). Since these two events appear to be the same, it may be safe to conclude that the sixth seal climaxes with the gruesome destruction described in 19:17–21.

The above examination supports the general observation (Strand) that the prophecy of the seals covers the broad sweep of Christian history, while the material in chapter 19 focuses on the final events leading up to the consummation of that history. This does not rule out the obvious fact that elements of this historical sequence may in their order focus on the end as part of that historical sweep. The evidence suggests that the fifth and sixth seals definitely "lean toward the end" and point toward the same climax referred to in Revelation 19. On the other hand the four horsemen (6:1–8) take their cue from the cross and its consequences, with emphasis on the earlier part of the Christian Era.

Introductory Sanctuary Scene

Throne-Centered

The word "throne" (*thronos*), representing the right to rule, is undoubtedly the key word in Revelation 4. It appears 14 times. Still central to the scene's activity, it appears five times in the next chapter. It almost disappears from view in chapter 6 (one time), but returns in 7:9–17 with an emphasis comparable to its position in chapter 4 (seven times in only nine verses).

Thus, chapter 4 sets the stage for the heavenly activity in chapter 5, while 7:9–17 is an extension of chapters 4 and 5 in its renewed focus on the throne. The throne nearly drops from view in chapter 6 because that chapter is concerned with events on earth.[18]

The throne, therefore, is clearly central to the visionary description (Rev 4–5).[19] It is the first thing John sees in heaven; after that, all activity is oriented to it.[20] Although the word "throne" normally is linked with God in the book of Revelation, it can be associated with Satan and his cohorts as well.[21] Thus, the centrality of the throne in this portion of Revelation highlights its concern with the controversy between God and Satan over the dominion of the universe.[22]

The opening verses of Revelation 5 portray a crisis point in the development of that controversy. The remainder of the chapter asserts that the death of Christ has guaranteed the outcome of that controversy, and that the exalted Christ now shares the throne of God.[23]

Sound of Singing

There is deliberate progression of thought in the five hymns of this introductory scene. Two hymns are addressed to the Father (4:8, 11). The next two are addressed to the Lamb (5:9–10, 11–12). The fifth and final hymn is addressed to both the Father and the Lamb (5:13).

That the equality of praise is the explicit highlight of this backdrop is evident from the ever-increasing volume of participants. The hymn of 4:8 is sung by the four living creatures alone. The hymn of 4:11 is sung by the 24 elders. The hymn of 5:9–10 is sung by both the living creatures and the elders. With the hymn of 5:11–12, scores of millions of angels join the heavenly choir. The fifth and final hymn (5:13) is sung by all creation. This ever-increasing participation indicates that it is heaven's greatest joy to exalt Jesus Christ even as His Father is exalted (cf. John 5:23).

The all-encompassing language of 5:13 suggests that this final hymn is proleptic (portrayed in advance): the entire universe in praise to God (cf. Phil 2:9–11).[24] Therefore, while the scene of chapter 5 highlights the enthronement of Christ at the beginning of the age, it also points forward to the universal rejoicing at the end.

Sanctuary Scene

No single element of Revelation 4 is drawn explicitly from the OT sanctuary; yet the cumulative effect of allusions reflects a strong reminiscence of that sanctuary and its services. We enumerate the evidence.

The word for "door" (*thura*, 4:1) appears over 200 times in the Greek OT (LXX), scores of which relate directly to the sanctuary.[25] Trumpets (4:1) were used in worship as well as battle (Num 10:8–10). It is possible that the throne (4:2) was intended to recall the ark of the covenant (cf. 11:19; Ps 99:1), but that cannot be assumed. It might correspond to the table of shewbread in the holy place,[26] since the table is the only article of sanctuary furniture not mentioned explicitly in Revelation.

The three precious stones (4:3) are also found in the breastplate of the high priest (Exod 28:17–21).[27] The 24 elders remind us of the 24 courses of priests in the Temple (1 Chr 24:4–19). The seven lamps (*lampades*, 4:5) may recall the candlestick in the holy place, although a different Greek word is used.[28] The sea of glass (4:6) makes use of the Greek word (*thalassa*) applied to the "molten sea" in Solomon's Temple (1 Kgs 7:23–24). The proximity of the four living creatures (4:6–8) to the throne in Ezekiel 1 and 10 remind us of the cherubim associated with the ark of the covenant (Exod 25:18–20; 1 Kgs 6:23–28). Cherubim were, however, visible also in the holy place (Exod 26:1, 31–35). Jewish tradition also associates the lion, calf, man, and eagle with the four banners or standards around which Moses organized the Israelite encampment in the wilderness (cf. Num 2).

In chapter 5 many of these images are repeated, with some additions. The slain Lamb (5:6), reminiscent of Isaiah 53:7, reminds us of the morning and evening sacrifices (Exod 29:38–42) or the Passover Sacrifice (1 Cor 5:7). The blood of the Lamb (5:9) provides the means to purchase the people of the earth for God. They in turn serve God in analogy to the priests of the OT sanctuary (5:10). The 24 elders hold golden bowls of incense which are interpreted as the prayers of the saints (5:8). Both the incense and the prayers of the saints are associated with the continual morning and evening sacrifices of the sanctuary.[29] No passage in Revelation contains a larger quantity or a wider variety of allusions to the sanctuary than this introductory sanctuary scene.

There were only two occasions in the Hebrew cultus when the entire sanctuary was involved: the Day of Atonement and the service of inauguration (cf. Exod 40). Inasmuch as Revelation 4–5 presents such a strong sanctuary scene, to which of these rites should it be linked? Since 3:21 associates this scene with the cross and the enthronement of Christ, since the language of "temple" (*naos*) and "judgment" (cf. 11:18–19) is absent, and since the implicit structure of Revelation places the Day of Atonement in the latter half of the book,[30] the best identification for the introductory sanctuary scene in chapters 4–5 is the service of inauguration.

Thus, we conclude that the scene is best understood as a portrayal of the inauguration of the entire heavenly sanctuary in A.D. 31. In 8:3–5 the author focuses more specifically on the daily services associated with the first apartment of the sanctuary. Later, in 11:19 the ark of the Second Apartment is clearly brought to view.

Old Testament Allusions

In an appendix to this chapter are a series of tables. Included in table 1 are OT passages John likely had in mind as he described the scene in Revelation 4. An examination of table 1 indicates repeated parallels to three great throne-visions of the OT: Isaiah 6; Ezekiel 1–10; and Daniel 7:9–14. In fact, only two major elements in the Revelation scene are not found in them, namely, the 24 elders and the creation hymn (4:4, 11). The three OT visions are roughly equal in their importance to Revelation 4, with Ezekiel 1 holding a slight edge in influence.

There is also a relationship to two earlier throne-oriented passages of the OT; the vision of Micaiah (1 Kgs 22:19; 2 Chr 18:18) and God's appearance at Sinai (Exod 19:16–24). In addition, a number of elements present in this scene are not found in any of the OT "throne-visions."[31] Therefore, although Ezekiel and Daniel are of major significance to Revelation 4, only about a third of the material in the chapter reflects them. Revelation 4 parallels a wide variety of sources in its description of the heavenly court.[32]

Chapter 5 builds on the scene in chapter 4. Therefore, most of the key OT throne passages contribute little or nothing new to the scene.[33] Daniel 7, however, provides the most prominent *structural* parallel. For example, Daniel 7 depicts God on the throne, books open for judgment, the coming of the "son of man," the bestowal of dominion over the earth, the presence of the saints, as well as multiplied myriads of the heavenly host.

Revelation 5:9–14 seems to be structured on major movements in Daniel 7:13–27. First, the Son of man receives dominion (Dan 7:13–14; cf. Rev 5:6–9). Then peoples, nations, and men of every language are mentioned (Dan 7:14; cf. Rev 5:9). Then the peoples receive dominion (Dan 7:18, 22, 27a; cf. Rev 5:10); and finally, control over all things is returned to God (Dan 7:27b; cf. Rev 5:13–14).

There are, however, significant differences between Daniel 7 and Revelation 5. Many intervening elements in Daniel are left out and many other elements are added in Revelation.[34] In Daniel the books (plural) are open before the Son of man appears on the scene; in Revelation the book (singular) is never opened in the vision.

Although John is familiar with the Danielic term "Son of man" for Christ (Rev 1:13), he deliberately avoids using it here. Rather, he prefers using the titles Lamb, Lion of Judah, and Root of David instead. In actuality, in spite of some general similarities, less than a quarter of Revelation 5 is drawn from Daniel 7.

Most striking of all, however, is the fact that John studiously avoids the language of judgment in this throne scene. In the Greek language judgment is usually expressed by the nouns *krisis* and *krima*, and the verb *krinō*.[35] As the references indicate, John is quite familiar with the language of judgment but deliberately avoids using it in the first half of the book of Revelation. The seeming exception (6:10) is not a description of the judgment, but a call for that judgment to begin.

In contrast to the rest of the NT, where the language of judgment is sometimes applied to the cross (cf. John 12:31; Rom 8:3) and the preaching of the gospel,[36] the language of judgment in Revelation is reserved for descriptions of end-time events (Rev 12–20).

We must resist the temptation, therefore, to assume that since Daniel 7 and Ezekiel 1–10 involve investigative judgments, Revelation 4–5 must likewise be an investigative judgment scene. John, in fact, generally avoids those parts of Daniel and Ezekiel that involve judgment. Rather, he concentrates on those parts offering familiar language with which to describe the heavenly throne-room.

For example, Ezekiel's throne scene (Ezek 1, 10) is repeatedly paralleled in Revelation 4. But judgment portions, like Ezekiel 9 (mark on forehead), come into play not in the introductory scene but in 7:1–8, a clear end-time setting. The 24 elders are given an intercessory task (5:8), but not a judgmental one (like the martyrs of 20:4). The crisis of chapter 5 is resolved not by judgment, but by the death of the Lamb.

To speak thus is not to deny that the cross itself was an act of judgment (John 12:31–32; Rom 8:3). If John had wished to emphasize the judgment aspects of the cross, it would have been easy for him to do so. But John deliberately avoids using that kind of language.[37] Therefore, as significant as the structural parallels to Daniel and Ezekiel are to this scene, they do not require us to suggest that any portion of the heavenly events in Revelation 4–5 portray the end-time, preadvent judgment.

This survey of OT backgrounds to the first introductory sanctuary scene in the book demonstrates the extent to which Revelation draws from elements in its literary background. It also demonstrates how the Holy Spirit packages these elements in creative ways, resulting in a fresh and original product. The interpreter must, therefore, avoid a random search of background sources for symbols that can be plugged in at will.

Symbols by their varied nature are fluid in meaning. Their particular significance must be determined by the immediate context, and not necessarily by their use in a previous context. Where the author's point is not plain from the immediate context, the interpreter may seek clues in the themes and context of background passages; but such "clues" should never be permitted to undo the meaning of texts which are reasonably clear in their own right.

Church Series Sets the Tone

Before beginning a more detailed analysis of the introductory vision to the seals it may be helpful to consider the role and function of the introductory scenes in Revelation. The best starting point for such an analysis is the introduction to the seven churches (1:9–20). It sets the pattern, in relatively clear language, for what John will do in more cryptic fashion from chapter 4 on.

The introductory scene to the seven churches provides the theological basis for the letters to the seven churches (Rev 2–3). Jesus comes to comfort John with a revelation of Himself (1:17–18). What He has done for John He will do for all the churches that John represents (1:19–20).[38]

Christ presents Himself to each church in terms of the characteristics listed in the first chapter.[39] No church is offered all His characteristics; it receives only those appropriate to its condition. In this manner the introductory scene remains in the background of the reader's consciousness throughout the letters to the churches.

Many characteristics of Revelation recall the dramas of the ancient, Greco-Roman world.[40] The sanctuary scenes at the beginning of most sections of Revelation function as the stage settings for the respective acts of the drama.[41] Each, therefore, is intended to be constantly in view throughout the section that it introduces. The scenes provide the theological undergirding for all that follows in that section of the book. They are not to be understood as completed before the following block of material begins.

A similar literary pattern can be found in the seals section of the book (4:1–8:1). The introductory scene (Rev 4–5) is repeatedly recalled in chapter 6 through the breaking of the seals (6:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12) and mention of the living creatures (6:1–8). The events of chapter 6 result from the successive acts of breaking the seals. Since the song of 5:13 can only be truly fulfilled in the new earth (Rev 21–22), the introductory scene is contemporary with the entire span covered by the seals (6:1–8:1).

The central focus of Revelation 5 is the cross of Christ (5:5, 6, 9, 12; cf. 3:21). Christ's overcoming on the cross provides the theological basis for the events of chapter 6, which is concerned with the people of God as they seek to overcome by His blood (cf. 12:11). Thus, the seals extend from the cross and enthronement of Christ to the end of the great controversy between Christ and Satan when the entire universe will be filled with a complete harmony of praise to God (5:13; cf. 7:9–17).

The Creator God

> After this I saw, and behold a door had been opened in heaven
> and the first voice which I had heard
> (speaking with me in trumpet-like tones)
> said, "Come up here, and I will show you the things
> which *must* happen after this."
>
> Rev 4:1

Heavenly Sanctuary Scene. The prophecy of the seals opens with an introductory scene in which John ascends into the heavenly sanctuary. The open door (*thura ēneōgmenē*) is reminiscent of the open door (*thuran ēneōgmenēn*) of access to Christ that bolsters the Philadelphia church in its weakness (3:8).[42] The trumpetlike voice recalls Jesus' previous appearance to John (1:10).

The phrase "what must happen after this"[43] deliberately recalls the purpose of Revelation (1:1, 19).[44] Jesus states that the "things which are and the things which are about to happen after this" are the substance of the book of Revelation (1:19). Revelation 1:1 indicates that the emphasis is upon the latter).

The absence of the "things which are" in 4:1 tells us two things: (1) the letters to the churches focus primarily on the original situation of John's time rather than on later history,[45] and (2) with chapter 4 we are moving to the main emphasis of the book—the events to take place after the time of the vision.[46] Seen in this light, the literary connection between the "open door" of 3:8 and 4:1 does not presuppose an end-time setting for the throne scene in Revelation 4–5.

The open door, through which John ascends into the heavenly courts, enables him to "see" the "revelation of Jesus Christ" that will result in the production of his book. It is not, therefore, straining the text to suggest that chapter 4 provides an introduction not only for the seals but for the rest of the book of Revelation.

"In the spirit" (4:2) seems to be John's way of introducing a visionary sequence (cf. 1:10; 17:3; 21:10). The tense of the Greek verb translated in the NASB, "was standing" (*ekeito*),[47] attests that the prophet does not understand the throne to be recently set up, but rather to have been continually in that place until that time. This is in contrast with Daniel 7:9 where thrones are "placed" or "set up,"[48] a clear signal that John does not perceive this scene to be a duplicate of that found in Daniel.

This heavenly sanctuary vision offers a series of images that highlight the glory of the scene (Rev 4:3–6a). There are precious stones, a rainbow, thunder and lightning, seven lamps, a crystalline sea of glass, and 24 elders who sit on thrones around *the* throne dressed in white robes and wearing golden crowns (*stephanoi*) on their heads.

Who are these 24 elders? They are mentioned 12 times in Revelation.[49] The fact that the numeral 24 is the sum of two sets of 12 may suggest a link with the New Jerusalem's 12 gates named after the 12 tribes of Israel *and* 12 foundations named after the 12 apostles of the Lamb.[50] A connection with the 144,000 (12 times 12) may also be indicated.

The 24 elders apparently represent exalted and redeemed humanity. Overcoming believers share God's throne, not angels (3:21). White robes normally are worn by the saints in Revelation.[51] And the golden crowns are not royal crowns (*diadēmata*, cf. Rev 19:11) but crowns of victory (*stephanoi*), particularly appropriate to the redeemed and Christ.[52]

This evidence of their humanity is further supported by the background evidence. Angels never sit on thrones anywhere in the Bible or in early Jewish literature.[53] Christians, on the other hand, who have royal functions[54] can be so depicted.[55] The word for "victory crowns" (*stephanoi*) is used of Christ's crown of thorns[56] and that of believers and their reward.[57] Angels never wear them.[58] Neither are angels called elders, although this is a common designation for the leaders of both synagogue and church.[59]

The 24 elders, therefore, appear to be human beings exalted to heaven prior to the consummation of all things. They are probably to be identified with the individuals raised at the resurrection of Christ.[60] They symbolize what all believers can become in Christ.[61]

Living creatures. The full significance of the four living creatures (4:6b–8) becomes evident only when they are seen in the light of John's literary background, a topic that cannot be explored here for lack of space. As heavenly throne-creatures, they introduce the first hymn sung in the throne-room, the threefold "holy" (4:8). This hymn is strongly reminiscent of 1:4, 8.

"Whenever" (*hotan*) the four living creatures praise the Father sitting on the throne, the 24 elders fall down in worship, cast their crowns before the throne, and sing a song of their own (4:9–11). The word "whenever" makes it clear that this scene in chapter 4 is not a particular point in time (such as A.D. 31 or 1844). Rather, it portrays the ongoing nature of heavenly worship. Chapter 4 is not a one-time event, but the basic setting for all activity in the heavenly throne-room.

In chapter 5 on the other hand a great crisis strikes the heavenly court. The elders' song in 4:11 begins with a word that will become central to the resolution of that crisis:

> You are *worthy*,
> our Lord and God,
> to receive glory
> and honor
> and power,
> because you created all things,
> and by your will
> they were created
> and have their being.

The elders ascribe ultimate worth to God on the grounds that, as Creator, He is the source for the existence of all creation.[62] Thus chapter 4 is brought to its glorious climax with no hint of the crisis to follow.

Crisis and Resolution

Revelation 5 moves from the general description of the throne-room and its activities to a particular point in time when a crisis develops. The crisis is a decisive, one-time event. But it is overcome by the death of the Lion/Lamb, resulting in universal rejoicing.

Although the throne is present, it is mentioned less frequently than in chapter 4.[63] Now the literary focus is on a scroll (*biblion*), its seals (*sphragidas*), the Lamb (*arnion*) and the issue of who is worthy (*axios*) to break the seals and open the scroll.

The seven-sealed scroll. A major problem for the interpretation of this section of Revelation (4:1–8:1) is the identity and significance of the seven-sealed scroll.[64]

When people are sealed (in Revelation), the sealing functions as a mark of protection or a sign of God's ownership (7:2; 9:4; cf. 14:1).[65] But when a book or a message is sealed, concealment normally is in view (22:10; cf. 10–14).[66]

What is the mysterious content of the scroll? It appears to have something to do with the overall purpose of the book of Revelation (1:1–2):

> The revelation of Jesus Christ,
> which God gave Him,
> to show to his servants
> the things which must soon happen,
> and He signified it
> sending it through his angel
> to His servant John,
> who testified concerning
> the Word of God
> and the Testimony of Jesus Christ,
> which he saw.

The book of Revelation came into being by a threefold process. God handed "revelation" to Jesus Christ, who conveyed it in symbol through an angel to John. John then passed on to the church, in the form of a "book [*biblion*] of prophecy" (22:7, 10, 18, 19), the things that he had seen.[67] Thus, it is a striking parallel when in chapter 5 God hands a "book" (*biblion*) over to Jesus.

The content of the transmission is summed up particularly in 1:1 by the phrase "things which must soon happen," that is, future events. These considerations, combined with the number of parallels between 1:4–8 and 4:1–8,[68] leave the impression that the scroll of chapter 5 is the content of Revelation itself. Thus, it may be inferred that the sealed scroll contains the destiny of the world, and the purpose and plan of God to deliver His people at the end of time, and to resolve the moral controversy in the universe.

This future action of God is fixed in His purpose (written down in a legal document), but is withdrawn from human knowledge (sealed);[69] hence John's weeping. Thankfully, it can be opened as a result of the cross.

Possible OT allusions. Significant background information offers other perspectives on the meaning of the scroll.[70] Two OT settings place scrolls in a judgment context. The unrolled scroll written on two sides in Ezekiel contains "words of lamentation, mourning and woe," a warning of the judgments about to fall upon Judah (2:9–10). The gigantic flying scroll written on both sides of Zechariah contains the curses of God against the flagrant sinners in the land (5:1–4). The scrolls, however, are already open when the prophets see them, so the parallels are not fully convincing.

Two other possible backgrounds relate to matters of inheritance. Roman wills were sealed by six witnesses and the testator.[71] And in Jeremiah's time written scrolls guarantee that his purchase of land according to the law of the *go'el*[72] will be valid even after the return from Babylonian exile (32:6–15).

Both ideas are attractive. As a will, the scroll could be opened and its instructions carried out because of Christ's sacrificial death.[73] As a deed of purchase, the scroll would represent the title deed to the world. John's weeping (4:4) would reflect the forfeiture of that inheritance as a result of sin. Through His death the Lamb redeems the forfeited inheritance and, thus, is worthy to break the seals and restore the rightful ownership.[74]

As attractive as these ideas are, and as true to the NT concept of the cross, they are not carried through consistently in the book of Revelation. If in mind here, they may function only as a literary device.[75]

Another sealed scroll is found in Isaiah (29:11, 18; 30:8). Like Revelation, the scroll of Isaiah contains the messages of the prophet himself. The absence of a strong structural parallel between Isaiah 29–30 and Revelation 5 makes it less than certain, however, that John was drawing on Isaiah for his description of the sealed scroll.

The enthronement imagery of chapter 5 is quite compatible with another OT concept. At the coronation of a new Israelite king, the scroll of the covenant (Deuteronomy) would be presented to him.[76] The reception of the scroll and the ability to open and read demonstrated the right to rule and to deal with any crisis that might occur. It would have been helpful to our understanding, however, if the possible allusion to Deuteronomy had been more explicit.

Some have argued that the sealed scroll should be identified with the Lamb's book of life (13:8; 21:27). Since this is the only book in Revelation whose content is clearly identified, it is worth consideration. The content of the sealed scroll, however, seems to be broader than that of the book of life.

Possible New Testament allusions. A more promising background, perhaps, is the NT concept of "mystery" (*mustērion*). In the NT the term "mystery" is always used in an eschatological sense.[77] It would only be revealed in the last days. But since Jesus is the Messiah, the last days have already come.[78] The apocalyptic kingdom has become a present reality.[79] Therefore, the fullness of the gospel, though hidden for ages, has now become an open mystery.[80] To announce the mystery of God (1 Cor 2:1) is to preach Christ crucified (1 Cor 1:23; cf. 2:2).

But even though the mystery is open to the followers of Jesus, it is closed to those who do not know Him (Matt 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10). Furthermore, certain aspects of that mystery are not yet fully disclosed even to the believer.[81] Although in one sense the last days have come in the Christ event, in another sense, they are also yet future.[82] Revelation shares the NT tension between what has already been revealed in Christ, and what can only be made known at the end.[83] In the "days" of the seventh trumpet the "mystery of God" will be completed (10:7).

The crisis in the universe (5:1–4) is precipitated by the combined rebellion of Satan and his cohorts in heaven and the human family on earth. The scroll is the heavenly book of destiny, containing the substance of God's ordained plan to meet that crisis. As such it would include all the information disclosed in Revelation, Daniel, and more. Because of His sacrificial death, the Lamb is able to set in motion events that will bring history to its foreordained conclusion.[84]

The series of the seven seals, nevertheless, portrays a period when God's purpose remains, to a large degree, hidden from earthly view (cf. 6:9–11). But from chapter 10 on, that purpose is to be clearly revealed through the messages of the three angels and the visible events of the consummation.

The Lamb's qualifications. That the universe is in crisis becomes evident from the description in this passage. God has a book in His hand that can be opened only by a fit person. But no such person is found, leading the prophet to weep. The question "Who is worthy?" calls for unique qualifications.[85] According to 5:9, 10, 12 the Lamb's unique qualifications derive from the fact that He was slain and thus enabled to redeem humanity with His blood.

Davidic dynasty reestablished. The Lion of Judah symbolism is, of course, based on the promise of rulership to the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:9–10). Combining this with the symbolism of the "Root of David" yields the idea that the enthronement of the Lamb implies the reestablishment of the eternal Davidic dynasty promised in the OT.[86] The Lamb is the promised Messiah. Thus, Jesus is understood to have reestablished the Davidic dynasty when He proclaimed the arrival of His kingdom (Matt 12:28; Luke 17:20–21).

The first impression is that the Lamb had been slain (vs. 6, *hōs esphagmenon*). However, the Lamb moves to take the book, making it clear that His death has been overcome (vs. 7; cf. 1:18). The Lamb then proceeds to join God on His throne, receive the worship of the heavenly host, and take over the government of the world (5:12–14; 17:14; 19:16; 22:3). Finally, at the conclusion of the prophecy, the Lamb marries the New Jerusalem, symbolic of the Christian community (19:6–8; 21:9ff.)[87]

There can be no question that for John, the Lamb is the exalted Christ of Revelation 1–3, who is qualified to take the book, not only on account of what He had done (His death on the cross), but on account of who He is. Thus, implicit in the text is the full divinity and humanity that the Lamb had to embody in order to carry out the redemptive task. The Lamb's humanity is evident in that He was slain. His divinity is evident in that He is exalted to the throne of God to receive the worship of all creation.[88]

The seven horns of the Lamb recall OT images of political and/or military power.[89] The seven eyes of the Lamb recall Zechariah's vision (4:10) in which the Lord Himself has seven eyes to scan the whole earth.[90] By these two symbols the all-powerful, all-knowing deity of the Lamb is clearly established.

Some suggest that when Jesus takes the book from the Father's hand, it implies that He has moved from the first apartment into the Second Apartment of the heavenly sanctuary. But there is no hint anywhere in the immediate vision that the throne of God is moved. Nor are the Lamb's movements significant to the scene, since He already stands "in the midst of the throne" (5:6). It is best to understand the vision of chapters 4 and 5 as a single scene in a single place in the heavenly sanctuary. The exact location does not seem to be critical to the interpretation of the vision.

A new song. The idea of singing a "new song" of praise to God is common in the OT. New songs are sung to praise God for a recent deliverance,[91] for acts of salvation and judgment,[92] or for His creative power which is manifest continually on earth in fresh ways.[93] Such a new song is entirely appropriate in the wake of God's greatest act of all time, the atoning death of Jesus Christ (5:8–10).

The royal priesthood (vs. 10) is based on God's declaration to Israel that the nation was to have a special priestly role (see Exod 19:5–6). Through Israel, Yahweh planned to bring the blessing of Abraham to all the nations (Gen 12:1–3; 22:18). In Christ that privilege is transferred to the church.[94] Thus, Revelation 5:9–10 declares the followers of Christ to be a New Israel, with a worldwide role of dominion and blessing. This dominion is an outgrowth of Christ's dominion that was established as a result of the cross (Rev 5:13; cf. Matt 28:18).

In verses 11–14 the crescendo of praise reaches a magnificent climax. All the intelligent creation praise both the Lamb and the Father sitting on the throne. While appropriate in the context of the enthronement of Christ at His ascension, the final hymn extends beyond the banishment of sin and its effects to the day when all creation will live to praise the Deity (cf. Phil 2:9–11).

Breaking the Seals

In chapter 6 the throne, the scroll, and even the Lamb fade largely from view. The point of connection with the introductory sanctuary scene is the opening or breaking of the seven seals that bind the scroll. The events delineated do not disclose the contents of the book. But as the Lamb opens each seal, certain events take place on earth.

Structural Parallels to the Old Testament

Covenant curses. We found the main structural parallels to chapters 4 and 5 in the throne-visions of the OT. On the other hand chapter 6 recalls the covenant curses in the Pentateuch and their execution in the context of the Babylonian exile.[95]

The concept of "war, famine, and pestilence" originated in the blessings and curses that climaxed the Holiness Codes[96] of the Pentateuch. The covenant curses of Leviticus 26:21–26 contain many parallels to the four horsemen of Revelation 6:

> If you remain hostile toward me
> and refuse to listen to me,
> I will multiply your afflictions seven times over,
> as your sins deserve.
> I will send wild animals against you, ...
> I will bring the sword upon you
> to avenge the breaking of the covenant....
> I will send a plague among you,
> and you will be given into enemy hands.
> When I cut off your supply of bread,
> ten women will be able to bake your bread in one oven,
> and they will dole out the bread by weight.
>
> Lev 26:21–26, NIV

War, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts are preliminary judgments from God, intended to bring about repentance (Vss. 27, 40–42) so that God's blessings may be restored.[97] Further rebellion, however, will result in desolation and exile, the ultimate curses of the covenant (vss. 28–39).

Deuteronomy 32 has many parallels to Leviticus 26. Verses 23–25 are about punishment for Israel's idolatry. Verses 41–43, however, move beyond Leviticus 26. Here the Lord's sword and His arrows are exercised to avenge His people:

> When I sharpen my flashing sword
> and my hand grasps it in judgment,
> I will take vengeance on my adversaries
> and repay those who hate me.
> I will make my arrows drunk with blood,
> while my sword devours flesh: ...
> Rejoice, O nations, with his people,
> for he will avenge the blood of his servants.
>
> Deut 32:41–43, NIV

When exercised upon His people, the sword, famine, and pestilence are preliminary judgments intended to lead them to repentance. When exercised upon nations who have shed the blood of His people, they are judgments of vengeance (cf. the fifth seal).

War, famine, and pestilence become stereotyped images in the prophets, who use them, as threats to ward off Israel and Judah's increasing apostasy.[98] Failing to repent, both divisions of the nations reaped the ultimate curse—exile.

With the Exile, however, God's attention is directed increasingly toward the nations who are afflicting His people. The judgments that had been directed toward them are now turned against their enemies. The great turning point in that process is dramatized in Zechariah (1:8–17; 6:1–8). The setting is a plaintive cry for help from the angel of the Lord:

> "Lord Almighty,
> how long will you withhold mercy
> from Jerusalem and from the towns of Judah,
> which you have been angry with
> these seventy years?"
> So the Lord spoke kind and comforting words
> to the angel who talked with me.
>
> Zech 1:12–13, NIV

Zechariah's horses. It is quite likely that the vision of the seals draws its major imagery from Zechariah's combination of four colored patrol horses with a plaintive "How long, O Lord?" The scene relates to the close of Judah's exile in Babylon. The wicked are at ease. God had given Judah into their hands as punishment for her sins. But the heathen overplayed their judgment role. God is now about to act in response to the covenant plea, "How long?"

Particularly significant for the seven seals is the equation of the four horses with the "four winds [spirits] of heaven" (Zech 6:5). This may indicate that the four winds of Revelation 7:1–3 are the horses of chapter 6 unleashed in a covenant reversal like that of Deuteronomy 32.[99]

The OT allusions thus imply that the seals focus particularly on the experience of God's people in the world. The sword, famine, and pestilence of the horses are covenant woes by which God punishes those who reject or disobey His covenant, with the intent to lead them to repentance.

In the NT context, of course, the covenant is to be understood in terms of the proclamation of the gospel of what God has done in Christ. The New Israel in Christ (5:9–10) conquers when it reckons itself into the victory of its commander, the slain Lamb. But failure to appropriate the gospel produces inevitable and ever-increasing consequences.

When God's people cry out to Him in their distress (6:9–11), He turns on those who persecute them. The horses apparently have their counterpart in the destroying winds of chapter 7. These are turned on those who do not have the seal of God. The horse-judgments affect only quarters of the earth (6:8); they are preliminary and partial. Their end-time counterparts, the wind-judgments (7:1–3), affect the whole earth with finality.

Synoptic Apocalypse

Parallels. In the Synoptic Apocalypse[100] Jesus appears to have combined the OT covenant woes with the OT heavenly signs of the "Day of the Lord." The parallels between the Synoptic Apocalypse and the seals are not always in the same order, but the multitude of verbal and thematic links makes it virtually certain that John intended the reader to perceive a strong analogy between them.[101]

Just as is the case in the Synoptic Apocalypse, so there is a general progression in time as one moves through the seals. The language of the four horsemen parallels the language Jesus used to describe the general character of the Christian Age between His time and the Second Coming. It is a time of proclaiming the gospel, and of war, famine, pestilence, and persecution.[102] After the fall of Jerusalem/Judah, Christ's prophetic gaze rested briefly on a period of heightened troubles and persecution.[103]

This era of persecution would be followed by end-time deceptions and heavenly signs leading up to the Second Coming itself.[104] It should be noted that the end-time deceptions are omitted in John's brief description of events to occur at the breaking of the sixth seal. However, these are taken up later in great detail in Revelation 13–17.[105] Thus, the events of the sixth seal are to be understood as contemporary with those depicted in that portion of the Revelation.

Significance of the parallels. The parallels between the seals and the Synoptic Apocalypse, therefore, are not only enormous in quantity, but share a remarkable clustering along chronological lines. This clustering underscores two main points. First, the seals parallel the Synoptic Apocalypse as a description of the entire Christian Age, not just its end-time. Second, it underscores what was observed earlier in comparing Revelation 6 with chapter 19. That is to say, the four horsemen express the realities of the entire Christian Age with emphasis on its beginning. The fifth and sixth seals deal with events leading up to the close of the age.

Interpretation of Revelation 6

Time of the seals. We recognize, in spite of the above discussion, that a number of elements in Revelation 4–6 suggest to some that the passage involves the investigative judgment as portrayed in Daniel 7:9–14. It is urged that the introductory scene is drawn from the imagery of Daniel 7. Thus the throne could be associated with the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary.[106] Furthermore, it is thought that the sixth chapter draws on the language of judgment. However, we must counter by observing that this is not the most natural way to read the seals.

The connection between the seals passage and 3:21, as outlined in detail above, implies that the introductory scene (Rev 4–5) depicts symbolically the enthronement of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary at His ascension. Chapter 7 ends with God's people in the throne-room. Therefore, the seals of chapter 6 portray events on earth from the cross to the Second Coming, with particular focus on the gospel and the experience of the people of God.

While the introductory scene draws imagery from Daniel 7, large differences become obvious when the two visions are compared. For example, attention is directed to one book in contrast to several in Daniel. The throne has not been set up recently. The book is sealed instead of open. The One who approaches the throne is symbolized as the Lamb, not as the Son of man. Thus, it is evident that the two scenes are not the same. It is more natural to understand the introductory scene as the inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary rather than its great end-time day of atonement.

This conclusion is supported by a number of other observations. There is a total absence of *explicit* judgment language in the whole section. The one exception to this is 6:10, where the judgment is understood to be still in the future! Although some feel the concept of judgment is present in chapter 6,[107] it is not out of place in the context of the preaching of the gospel (John 3:18–21; 5:22–25). End-time judgment, however, only becomes explicit in the language of the book from 11:18 onward.

The parallels to chapter 19 and the Synoptic Apocalypse also underline the placement of Revelation 4–6 in the historical portion of Strand's chiasm. This placement is further underlined by John's larger strategy for the first half of the book of Revelation.[108]

We conclude, therefore, that the introductory sanctuary scene is a description of the enthronement of Christ and the inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary in A.D. 31. This event was made possible by His victory on the cross. Chapter 6 portrays the consequences on earth from that time until the Second Coming. Its focus is on the gospel and on the historical process within which God's people overcome just as Christ overcame.

First seal (6:1–2). The first living creature (Lion, with a voice like thunder!) calls forth a white horse whose rider carries a bow and goes out conquering. The interpretation of this seal is decisive for understanding all four horsemen. There are three major views.

Most preterist scholars prefer to understand the seals as describing in literal language events shortly to take place in the Roman Empire.[109] In this interpretation the rider on the white horse symbolizes military conquest.[110]

Other scholars see in the white horse a portrayal of the future antichrist, a parody of the Christ portrayed in chapter 19. In this interpretation, the seals portray the activity of Satan's kingdom in the events leading up to the end.

A third group of scholars understand the four horsemen of the seals to be a symbolic portrayal of the victorious spread of the gospel and the consequences of its rejection. Each of these will be taken up in its turn.

1. The preterist view. While Adventists do not accept the presuppositions of preterist scholars, it is possible that the war, famine, and pestilence of the seals are to be taken in their natural meaning as is the case with the parallel imagery of the Synoptic Apocalypse. If so, the message of the seals would exactly parallel that of the Synoptic Apocalypse, a portrayal of the natural disasters and the persecution that characterize the Christian Age and lead up to the heavenly signs that mark its close. However, a number of factors suggest a more symbolic approach to the seals.

First, the entire book of Revelation is "signified" (*esēmanen*, 1:1). Much of its imagery would make little sense if taken literally. Second, the horses themselves are never interpreted as literal. Third, since chapters 4 and 5 are filled with symbolic language, what indication is there that chapter 6 is any different? Certainly no Adventist would interpret the fifth seal literally. Finally, the detailed images of the four horsemen make coherent sense when understood in the light of figurative and spiritual meanings familiar to people at the time Revelation was written.

2. The futurist view. Many scholars interpret the seals in a symbolic way, but argue that the rider on the white horse is the antichrist on several grounds. (1) The "bow" represents the power of Gog and Babylon in the OT, and these are types of the antichrist. (2) the satanic beasts of chapters 11 and 13 "conquer" the saints (11:7; 13:7, *nikaō*, the same verb as used in 6:2). (3) There is a continual interaction in Revelation between the true and the counterfeit.[111] (4) The "it was given" (*edothē*, 6:2) is a "divine passive" and is parallel to 9:1 where God permits the angel of the abyss to lead his demonic hordes against humanity. (5) While the white horse of 6:2 is an exact verbal parallel to the white horse of 19:11, there are many striking differences between the two accounts;[112] thus, they should not be equated.

These arguments in favor of the antichrist hypothesis are not as strong as they may at first appear.

a. While the bow is used to portray the power of God's enemies in the OT, it is in each case introduced so it can be smashed by Yahweh's superior power.[113] In an even greater number of cases, bows and arrows represent Yahweh's weapons directed against His enemies.[114]

b. Although the Greek word for "conquering" is used to refer to the beasts and their persecution of the saints, the more *immediate* context of 6:2 is the "conquering" of Christ on the cross (5:5, 6, 9; cf. 3:21), which provides the basic substance of the gospel proclamation.

c. The dragon, beast, and false prophet do indeed counterfeit the Trinity. Their evil character is clearly portrayed in their opposition to the woman and the saints. On the other hand, in the case of 6:2 John gives no hint that the color white should be taken in a negative sense.[115] And with only one exception in the NT, a *stephanos* (victory crown) is always associated with Christ or His people.[116]

d. While it is true that God's activity is to be seen behind the judgments of the fifth trumpet, the giving of the key in 9:1 and authority in 9:3, 5 indicates that God is permitting, with limitations, the activity of Satan to run rampant. But in chapter 6 the activity of the four horses is not permitted; it is "commanded."[117] Does God command antichrist to behave the way he does?

e. The differences between chapters 6 and 19 are explainable in terms of the difference between the church militant and the church triumphant. Christ wears the diadem[118] in 19:12 because His conquering activity[119] is complete. He wears the victory crown (*stephanos*) in 6:2 because the heavenly kingdom attained by the cross is still in the process of establishing its dominion on earth.

3. The historicist view. The positive nature of the white horse is supported by the fact that the first horseman does not produce afflictions as do the other three. There is no hint of counterfeit in the text itself. And if the rider on the white horse symbolizes the gospel, the analogy with the Synoptic Apocalypse is more complete than it would otherwise be.[120]

It seems best, therefore, to understand the white horse to symbolize Christ's kingdom and its gradual conquest of the world through the preaching of the gospel by His church. What was ratified in heaven at the enthronement of the Lamb is now actuated in the experience of His people in the course of human history.

This picture is probably based on the Israelite kingship motif in Psalm 45:3–7, NIV:

> Gird your sword upon your side, O mighty one;
> clothe yourself with splendor and majesty.
> In your majesty ride forth victoriously
> in behalf of truth, humility and righteousness;
> let your right hand display awesome deeds.
> Let your sharp arrows pierce the hearts of the king's enemies;
> let the nations fall beneath your feet.
> Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever;
> a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom.
> You love righteousness and hate wickedness;
> therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions
> by anointing you with the oil of joy.

Psalm 45 combines this military image with that of a royal wedding (Ps 45:10–15). When the conquest is complete the wedding can take place. But in Revelation 6:2 the conquest is just getting under way, the wedding must await a future time (19:6–8; 21:9ff.). Since the phrase "conquering and to conquer" expresses a progressive increase of victory, the white horse does not end with the first century. Rather, the symbol portrays in a general way the progress of the gospel during the entire Christian Era.

Second seal (6:3–4). At the opening of the next seal the second living creature (the calf or young bull, 4:7) calls forth a red horse. Its rider receives a great sword and is permitted to take peace from the earth, resulting in war and mutual human destruction.

The horse is not "red" in the technical sense. The adjective is drawn from the Greek word for "fire" (*pur*). Fire in the book of Revelation is often associated with heavenly things (8:5; 14:18) but always for the purpose of judgment (8:7; 20:10, 14, 15).[121]

Although the imagery in this passage recalls military warfare, the only other mention of "peace" in Revelation is of a spiritual nature (1:4). The Greek word for "slay" is normally used of the death of Christ and of His saints.[122] Consequently, it is unlikely that the second seal refers primarily to military strife. It may rather represent persecution, the loss of spiritual peace, and division over the gospel.

In Psalm 45 the same horseman who shoots arrows at his enemies also carries a sword as he rides off. The same gospel message that is a savor of life unto life can also become a savor of death to those who reject it.[123] One is reminded of the words of Jesus:

Whoever confesses me before men,
I will also confess before my father in heaven.
But whoever denies me before men,
I will also deny before my father in heaven.
Do not think that I have come to bring peace upon the earth:
I have not come to bring peace but a sword.
For I have come to turn
a man against his father
a daughter against her mother and
a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.
A man's enemies will be of his own household.

Matt 10:32–36

Wherever the gospel is preached victories take place, but even more often comes division and persecution as a result of its rejection.[124] The peace that comes from union with Christ must not be confused with the peace that comes from the favor of others.

Third seal (6:5–6). At the opening of the third seal the third living creature (presumably, the one with the face of a man) calls forth a black horse. Its rider holds a pair of scales.

The color "black" is not otherwise symbolic in the Greek Scriptures. It is normally used for the color of hair or skin on the one hand and for "ink" on the other. Its meaning in this passage probably derives from its contrast with the white horse of the first seal.

The "scale" (*zugon*) is often used as a symbol of God judging people.[125] In this case it would be judgment according to the gospel.[126]

The rider on the black horse, unlike the first two riders, apparently engages in no action. A voice from the midst of the four living creatures proclaims:

A quart of wheat for a denarius,
and three quarts of barley for a denarius:
and do not injure the oil and the wine.

Grain, oil, and wine were the three main crops of ancient Palestine. As such they represented the blessing of God.[127] Since grain is shallow-rooted, it is more easily damaged in a drought than olives and grapes. A denarius was the ancient designation for a day's wage. Under these circumstances, a day's earnings could only provide enough wheat (the grain of preference) for one person to survive on. The picture is of a drought-induced famine that has not yet progressed to the level where deep-rooted plants and trees are affected.[128]

Once again the language of the seal suggests a spiritual rather than literal application. If the white horse represents the gospel, the black horse would represent its opposite, erroneous doctrine.

Although in Revelation 14 the grain harvest represents the righteous and the grape harvest the wicked, in this instance the famine context implies that all three food products represent spiritual benefits. Thus, the seal essentially depicts a famine for the Word of God (cf. Amos 8:11–12), but a famine that is limited by the command of Heaven so as to not remove the means of grace.[129] The gospel has been obscured, but its benefits are still available.

Fourth seal (6:7–8). As the fourth seal is opened, the fourth living creature (probably the eagle or vulture) calls forth a rider on a yellow-green colored horse. This rider, Death, is followed by Hades, and has authority over a quarter of the earth to kill with the sword,[130] famine, pestilence (death),[131] and the beasts of the earth. This intensification of the harmful activities of the second and third horsemen is augmented by the other two elements of covenant judgment: pestilence (death) and wild beasts.[132]

If the seal is to be understood in spiritual terms, it depicts by far the most serious spiritual declension yet described in the book (the climax comes in 18:2–3). It is a pestilence of soul. These plagues fall on those whose rejection of the gospel has hardened to the point of near hopelessness.

In 1:18 death and Hades (grave) are clearly under Christ's control. In 20:14 they are in association with the concept of the "second death." This triple parallel offers evidence that the fourth seal involves the threat of permanent exclusion from mercy.

This seal, however, as terrible as it is, is not to be equated with the final end-time close of probation of which it is clearly a foretaste. As was the case with the third horseman, this rider does not "go out," thus limiting the plague. In the background texts of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 32 these plagues are not final but are intended to evoke repentance. Further judgments on the wicked lie ahead in the fifth and sixth seals.

Four horsemen. The four horsemen probably should be understood more as a progression of thought than as a rigid historical sequence. In the first place, the virtual absence of any reference to time is in striking contrast, for example, to the seven trumpets.[133] Furthermore, the woes reflected in seals 2–4 are ordered in a wide variety of ways in the OT.[134] A similar variety of usage can be seen by comparing the three versions of the Synoptic Apocalypse (Matt 24; Mark 13; Luke 21), where these woes constitute the general character of the Christian Age.

The description of the rider on the white horse—"conquering and to conquer"—suggests an ongoing activity rather than a period of history to be followed by another period.

Thus, the four horsemen most likely represent a general description of the spread of the gospel (white horse), the resulting persecution and division (red horse), and the increasing consequences of rejection of that gospel (black and pale horses).[135] The central theme is that the preaching of the gospel and the arrival of the new age in Christ does not halt the spread of evil in the world. This expresses well the tension between the two ages so characteristic of the NT as a whole.

However, having said this, it is noteworthy that the thematic progression of the four horses fits well with the history of the first thousand years of the Christian Era.

First, there was the initial, rapid expansion of the church throughout much of the then-known world. The succeeding period brought division and compromise in the face of persecution. The loss of a clear understanding of the gospel followed as the church settled into an earthly kingdom in the years after Constantine. Finally, the Dark Ages of spiritual decline and death engulfed Christendom. Thus the progression of thought may well be chronological, at least in the first appearance of each change.[136]

This view is supported by the fact that the four living creatures are never separated in Scripture except in the four horsemen. Their successive involvement in (6:1–8) is a clue that a certain chronological progression parallels the progression of thought. The four horses, therefore, outline both the trend of history at the beginning of the Christian Era, and the general realities of the Christian Age.[137]

The preaching of the gospel and its consequences—victories for the kingdom, persecution, division, and (for those who reject), increasing spiritual famine and decline—have proven to be realities at both the corporate and the individual level. The *final* going forth of the rider on the white horse is attested by the sealing message in chapter 7 and the three angels' messages in chapter 14.

As mentioned earlier, the first two riders are said to "go out," whereas the last two are only seen. Each affects only a quarter of the earth (6:8). Thus, the "judgments" of the horsemen are partial and restrained. The third and fourth horsemen themselves are not final events. They are preliminary and partial foretastes of the great end-time collapse of spiritual life and understanding. Historically they fit the Middle Ages best, a time of spiritual decline and persecution.

Fifth seal (6:9–11). The opening of the fifth seal reveals a picture of slain righteous persons "under the altar" who cry out,

How long, O Lord,
the holy and true One,
do You not judge and avenge our blood
on those who live on the earth?

The scene is symbolizing believers who have been sacrificed for their faith in times previous to the opening of this seal. After receiving white robes these martyrs are informed that they should rest a little while longer until their fellow servants and brethren, who are about to be killed as they were, are "completed" or "fulfilled."

The imagery of the dead beside the altar represents the frustration of God's people for whom the content of the sealed scroll is yet hidden. Though their trust in God is unshaken, they long for the final judgment when their names will be cleared in a higher court. The fifth seal represents the divine awareness of His peoples' sufferings, and He will respond when the time is right. God's concern for His suffering people is the point of the passage; it is not intended to explain the state of the dead.[138]

The phrase "how long" is used frequently in the OT, particularly in relation to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians (Hab 1:2). Psalm 79 is of interest:

How long, O Lord? Will you be angry forever?
How long will your jealousy burn like fire?
Pour out your wrath on the nations
that do not acknowledge you,
on the kingdoms
that do not call on your name; ...
Why should the nations say,
"Where is their God?"
Before our eyes, make known among the nations
that you avenge the outpoured blood of your servants.

Vss. 5, 6, 10, NIV

In the fifth seal we see the results of the persecutions which have been alluded to in the horsemen, particularly the second. Thus the fifth seal represents a later point in time than the four horsemen themselves.[139] Since the phrase "How long?" is applied in Daniel 7:21, 25; 12:6–7 to the great tribulation of the Middle Ages, Revelation 6:10 appropriately represents a "cry" of protest from the martyrs of that same era.

It is evident that the cry of the martyrs occurs prior to the actual time of judgment and the final crisis. The terms "judge" and "avenge" indicate a two-part request. The martyrs wish to be vindicated and avenged.[140] From the perspective of the "How long?" cry both judgment and vengeance are future. The giving of white robes (vs. 11) symbolizes the vindication of the martyrs in the investigative judgment (cf. 3:5). Nevertheless, the execution of that judgment is still future.

The comparison between 6:10 and 19:2 (see above) indicates that 6:11 alludes to the beginning of the investigative judgment, while chapter 18 portrays its conclusion just before the Second Advent.[141] Thus, the fifth seal is divided into two parts chronologically: (1) The martyrs' cry is prior to the investigative judgment (vs. 10). (2) The giving of white robes signals the onset of that judgment.

Therefore, the fifth seal fits well between the great persecutions of the Middle Ages and the conclusion of the investigative judgment. The end has been delayed. The gospel task is not yet complete when this seal draws to a close.

Sixth seal (6:12–17). The opening of the sixth seal unleashes massive heavenly and earthly phenomena. There is a great earthquake (evidently prior to and distinct from the one in 16:18), a series of heavenly signs, and an even greater earthquake that moves every mountain and island out of its place (probably the earthquake of 16:18).

The final earthquake leads to the great terror of unsaved humanity, who utilize caves and the rocks of the mountains in a futile attempt to hide from the approaching presence of the One sitting on the throne and of the wrath of the Lamb. The unsaved cry out,

For the great day of His wrath has come,
and who will be able to stand?

The heavenly signs and earthquakes of this seal are not unique to this passage. They recall a long history of similar phenomena in the "day of the Lord" passages of the OT.[142] Perhaps, even more important to John is Jesus' use of heavenly signs in Matt 24:29—

Immediately after the distress of those days
the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light;
the stars will fall from the sky,
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.

The parallel with the Synoptic Apocalypse argues that some, at least, of these phenomena fall shortly after the great tribulation period alluded to in the fifth seal. That the heavenly signs are to be understood as literal is indicated by the fact that each is followed by an "as" (*hōs*) which in this construction introduces a figurative analogy to an actual event.[143]

The sixth seal, therefore, spans the period from the cry of the martyrs to the end-time. Since the heavenly signs of 1780 and 1833 had a great impact on the developing interest in the study of prophecy, the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 is the best candidate for the earthquake of 6:12.[144] Revelation 6:14 points forward to the final crash of all things terrestrial and celestial insofar as they pertain to this planet (cf. 2 Pet 3:9–12).

Seventh seal (8:1). The opening of the seventh seal results in only a simple statement to the effect that a brief silence occurs in heaven. The silence functions like a calm after the storm of destruction occasioned by Christ's second coming. A number of explanations have been offered to explain the meaning of this silence, but none has proved decisive.

One possibility is that the silence is an announcement that the justice of God has been fully executed. This is based on textual statements that in the face of injustice God refuses to keep silent until justice has been served (cf. Ps 50:3–6; Isa 65:6–7).

For Zion's sake I will not keep silence,
for Jerusalem's sake I will speak out,
until her right shines forth like the sunrise,
her deliverance like a blazing torch,
until the nations see the triumph of your right
and all the kings see your glory.

Isa 62:1–2, NEB

Other possibilities for interpreting the silence of this seal include the end-time counterpart to the silence at the beginning (Gen 1:2; cf. 4 Ezra 7:26–31); the silence of the universe as it watches the destruction of evil (in stark contrast to the celebration of Revelation 5); and the silence of the courtroom when the book is finally opened.[145]

Since the sixth seal portrays the events surrounding the Second Coming itself (6:15–17) and describes the presence of the redeemed before the throne (7:9–17), the seventh seal may be best understood as either a cryptic precursor of the millennium or the universal peace that results from the consummation at the end of the millennium (cf. Rev 20:9–15).

Conclusion

Although no attempt was made to align the interpretations of this chapter with those of Uriah Smith, his views on the seals are remarkably similar to the conclusions of this chapter.[146] While at times he himself did not grapple with the text,[147] his conclusions must be taken seriously by Adventists when he did.

What difference does it make to everyday Christian living that we have gained a better understanding of this prophecy? Of major importance is the fact that our passage draws aside the curtain that hides the unseen world of spiritual reality from us who live on earth. The grand introductory scene (Rev 4–5) impresses upon us that the scenes that follow are a visible and earthly expression of the invisible and heavenly conflict between Christ and Satan.[148]

The same Christ who safeguards the churches (Rev 1–3) also sits on God's throne in heavenly places (Rev 4–5). He knows and cares when His people suffer or are forced to walk this life alone because of their faith in Him. It is, therefore, not surprising that God's people throughout the Christian Era have found meaning for their lives in the strange collection of images that make up the apocalyptic portions of the book.

The seals of chapter 6 provide a telling description of Christian life on this earth between the cross and the Second Coming. God's suffering people may at times wonder if reality does not prove their faith an illusion. The glory and the glitter seem to reside with the opponents of the gospel. But the fact that the grim realities of earth's history and experience follow upon the opening of the seals in heaven demonstrates that these realities are under the control of the Lamb, who is already reigning (Rev 5) and whose perfect kingdom will soon be consummated (11:15–18).[149]

To beleaguered saints a theological treatise is far less effective than the apocalyptic pictures of a slain lamb who wins an irreversible victory. Through contemplation of that Lamb and His victory by faith, the suffering and harassed ones gain courage to finish their course. After quoting portions of Revelation 5 and 7, Ellen White says,

> Will you catch the inspiration of the vision? Will you let your mind dwell upon the picture? Will you not be truly converted, and then go forth to labor in a spirit entirely different from the spirit in which you have labored in the past, displacing the enemy, breaking down every barrier to the advancement of the gospel, filling hearts with the light and peace and joy of the Lord?[150]

> If we would permit our minds to dwell more upon Christ and the heavenly world, we should find a powerful stimulus and support in fighting the battles of the Lord. Pride and love of the world will lose their power as we contemplate the glories of that better land so soon to be our home. Beside the loveliness of Christ, all earthy attractions will seem of little worth.[151]

There is one further insight of crucial importance. We stand in history between two earthquakes and two sets of celestial phenomena (Rev 6:12–14). The portents of the end-time have already gotten under way. Though the apparent delay of the Advent causes many to say "How long?" it is comforting to know that from the standpoint of the Father, who sees the end from the beginning, we are nearly home!

Tables of Allusions (1–4)

Table 1—The Old Testament in Revelation 4

Rev 4:1
- Exod 19:24
- Ezek 1:1, 4
- Ezek 3:12–13
- Ezek 8:1–4
- Ezek 11:1, 24
- Dan 2:28, 29, 45 (Theod)
- Dan 7:6–7

Rev 4:2–3
- Exod 28:17–21
- 1 Kgs 22:19
- 2 Chr 18:18
- Isa 6:2
- Ezek 1:26–28
- Ezek 28:13
- Dan 7:9

Rev 4:4
- 1 Chr 24:4–19
- Isa 24:23
- Dan 7:9

Rev 4:5
- Exod 19:16–18
- Exod 25:37
- Isa 6:6
- Ezek 1:4, 13, 14
- Ezek 10:6–7
- Dan 7:9
- Zech 4:2

Rev 4:6–7
- Ps 18:10–11
- Ezek 1:5, 6, 10, 13, 18, 22
- Ezek 10:1, 12, 14
- Dan 7:2, 3, 10

Rev 4:8
- Exod 3:14
- Ps 99:1
- Isa 6:2–3
- Ezek 1:6, 18
- Ezek 10:12
- Amos 3:13; 4:13 (LXX)

Rev 4:9–10
- 1 Kgs 22:19
- 2 Chr 18:18
- Isa 6:1, 3
- Dan 4:34; 6:27; 12:7 (Theod)

Rev 4:11
- Dan 4:37 (LXX)

Table 2—The Old Testament in Revelation 5

Rev 5:1
- 1 Kgs 22:19
- 2 Chr 18:18
- Isa 6:1
- Isa 29:11
- Dan 8:26
- Dan 12:4, 9
- Ezek 2:9–10

Rev 5:2–3
- Exod 20:4
- Deut 5:8
- Dan 7:10
- Dan 12:4, 9

Rev 5:4–5
- Gen 49:9–10
- Isa 11:1, 10
- Dan 7:10

Rev 5:6
- Isa 24:23
- Isa 53:7
- Jer 11:18–19
- Ezek 1:5, 10, 13
- Zech 3:9
- Zech 4:2, 6, 10

Rev 5:7
- 1 Kgs 22:19
- 2 Chr 18:18
- Isa 6:1
- Dan 7:13

Rev 5:8
- Ps 141:2
- Isa 24:23
- Ezek 1:5, 10
- Dan 7:18, 22, 27

Rev 5:9–10
- Exod 19:6
- Ps 33:3
- Ps 40:3
- Ps 96:1
- Ps 98:1
- Ps 144:9
- Ps 149:1
- Isa 42:5, 10
- Dan 7:14, 27 (vs. 9)
- Dan 7:18, 22, 27 (LXX)

Rev 5:11–12
- Isa 24:23
- Ezek 1:5, 10
- Dan 7:10

Rev 5:13
- Exod 20:4
- 1 Kgs 22:19
- 2 Chr 18:18
- Isa 6:1
- Dan 7:27

Rev 5:14
- Isa 24:23
- Ezek 1:5, 10

Table 3—The Old Testament in Revelation 6

Rev 6:1–2

- Ps 45:3–7
- Hab 3:8–9
- Zech 1:8–17*
- Zech 6:1–8*

Rev 6:3–4

- Exod 32:27
- Deut 7:22–25
- Deut 9:1–5
- Judg 7:20–22
- Ps 45:3–4
- Isa 19:2
- Isa 26:3–4
- Isa 57:19–21
- Zech 14:13

Rev 6:5–6

- Lev 26:26
- Deut 7:13
- Deut 11:14
- Deut 28:51
- 2 Kgs 7:1
- Jer 2:3
- Ezek 4:16–17*
- Dan 5:27
- Hos 2:8, 22
- Amos 8:11–12

Rev 6:7–8

- Prov 5:5
- Jer 14:12*
- Jer 15:2–3*
- Jer 21:6–9*
- Jer 24:10
- Jer 29:17–18
- Ezek 5:12, 17*
- Ezek 14:15–21*
- Ezek 29:5–8
- Ezek 33:27*
- Hos 8:1
- Hos 13:14*

Rev 6:9–11

- Gen 4:10–11
- Exod 29:12
- Lev 4:7*
- Lev 17:11*
- Deut 32:43*
- 2 Kgs 9:7*
- Ps 79:5, 10*
- Isa 6:1ff.*
- Isa 57:1–2
- Dan 8:13
- Dan 12:6, 7, 13
- Hos 4:1*
- Hab 1:2

Rev 6:12–14

- Ps 102:25–26
- Isa 13:10–13*
- Isa 34:4*
- Isa 50:1–7*
- Isa 54:10
- Jer 4:23–27*
- Ezek 32:7–8*
- Ezek 38:19–20
- Joel 2:10*
- Joel 2:28–31
- Amos 8:8, 10*
- Nah 1:5–8*
- Hag 2:6–9*

Rev 6:15–17

- Gen 3:8*
- 1 Kgs 22:19*
- 2 Chr 18:18*
- Ps 2:2*
- Ps 33:16
- Ps 34:15–18
- Ps 46
- Ps 47:8*
- Ps 76:4–10
- Isa 2:10–11*
- Isa 2:17–21*
- Isa 6:1*
- Isa 24:21–23*
- Isa 34:12*
- Jer 4:29*
- Hos 10:8*
- Joel 1:15
- Joel 2:1
- Joel 2:11
- Joel 2:31*
- Nah 1:6*
- Zeph 1:14, 15, 18*
- Zeph 2:2–3*
- Mal 3:2*

Table 4—Synoptic Apocalypse and Revelation 6

Rev 6:1–2	Matt 24:14 Mark 13:10	Gospel
Rev 6:3–4	Matt 24:6, 7, 10 Mark 13:7, 8, 12 Luke 21:9, 10, 16, 25	War
Rev 6:5–6	Mark 13:8 Luke 21:11	Famine
Rev 6:7–8	Luke 21:11	Pestilence
Rev 6:9–11	Matt 24:9–10 Matt 10:17–22 Mark 13:9, 11–13 Luke 21:12, 16, 17	Persecution
Rev 7:14	Matt 24:9, 21, 29 Mark 13:19, 24	Tribulation
Rev 6:10	Luke 21:22	Vengeance
Rev 6:12–13	Matt 24:29 Mark 13:24–25 Luke 21:25–26	Heavenly Signs
Rev 6:15–17	Matt 24:30	Tribes Mourn
Rev 6:17	Matt 24:30 Mark 13:26 Luke 21:27	Son of Man Comes
Rev 7:1–3	Matt 24:31 Mark 13:27	Send Angels
Rev 7:3	Matt 24:31 Mark 13:27	Gather Elect

Chapter XII

Sealed Saints and the Tribulation

Beatrice S. Neall

Editorial Synopsis. Revelation 7 is one of the most important segments in the prophetic series of the seven seals. It occurs as an interlude between the sixth and seventh seals. Since the events of the sixth seal extend beyond the close of probation to include the second coming of Christ, it is obvious that the time frame of the interlude would have to overlay the last portion of probationary time in the sixth seal. It answers the question forced from the unwilling lips of the impenitent: The great day of divine wrath has come, "and who can stand before it?"

Adventists have generally held that the sealing angel of 7:2–3, who seals God's end-time people (while other angelic forces hold back the winds of total trouble and strife), is to be identified with the work of the third angel of 14:9–11. Both have a worldwide message, both present that message in the same time slot—prior to Christ's return, and both deal with the Sabbath truth. One heralds it as the seal of God's law of the Ten Commandments; the other warns against the acceptance of a counterfeit Sabbath, the mark of the beast.

In this study the author expands on what is involved in the sealing work, the characteristics of the sealed, and the tribulation period that faces the sealed saints (the 144,000) when the winds of strife and persecution are released, ultimately followed by the seven last plagues. Although Adventists have generally separated the 144,000 from the great multitude seen before the throne in the interlude's closing scene, evidence supports the belief that they are one and the same group. That is, the sealed 144,000 *symbolize* the great multitude from every nation, kindred, and tongue who will remain loyal to God in the closing conflict of the great controversy between God and Satan. These will eventually stand victorious before the throne of God and the Lamb.

Although the sealed saints are exposed to the "wrath" of the dragon and his associate agencies, they are sustained and protected by God who, in sealing them, acknowledges them as His own treasured possession. Their key virtue will be an undying, unyielding faith that is riveted to the Person and promises of Christ.

Chapter Outline

I. Introduction
II. Covenant Themes/Allusions
III. Chiastic Counterpart
IV. The Tribulation
V. The Sealing
VI. Commentary on Revelation 7
VII. The 144,000 and the Great Multitude
VIII. Characteristics of the Sealed
IX. Some Theological Concerns

Introduction

Revelation 7 pictures the security of God's servants in the midst of earth's final crisis. This segment of the seal series occurs as an interlude between the cataclysmic events of the sixth seal and the silence of the seventh. To grasp its significance we will explore several areas in this study.

Covenant Themes/Allusions

The book of Revelation (in common with noninspired apocalyptic literature) shows how the covenant promises of a glorious future will be ultimately fulfilled to the people of God.[1] It reveals history as a controversy between the forces of good and evil, the latter causing great havoc to the covenant people until God finally intervenes and conquers. Revelation 7 develops the covenant themes announced in the preceding chapters.

The Seven Churches: Covenant Allusions

The messages to the seven churches introduce the covenant theme, with Jesus as suzerain ("the ruler of kings on earth," 1:5) exhorting the churches to be loyal to their Sovereign even unto death (2:10).[2] The promises to the churches can be seen as covenant blessings, and the threats as covenant curses. The major violation warned against is apostasy (loss of love, 2:4; apathy, 3:1; and lukewarmness, 3:16; or in terms of a marriage covenant, fornication, 2:14, 20; cf. 14:8; 17:1–2).

Punishments for violating the covenant include excommunication (2:5; 3:16), war (2:16), and death (2:23). The covenant blessings include the gift of the white robe (3:5), deliverance from the hour of trial (3:10), a place in the temple of God (3:12), and the name of God on the forehead (3:12)—all conspicuous in chapter 7.

Covenant Blessings/Curses As Predictions

In both the Pentateuch and Revelation the covenant blessings and curses are, in a sense, predictions, outlining the future consequences of obedience or disobedience. The Torah narrates the giving of the covenant; the rest of the Old Testament is the account of what happened to Israel when they obeyed or violated the covenant. The book of Revelation follows a similar pattern.

The first unit, like the Torah, spells out the covenant,[3] while the rest of the book tells what would happen in consequence of adherence to or violation of the covenant. The 144,000 of the 12 tribes of Israel (that is, the church) standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion (Rev 14:1) are the faithful; the harlot Babylon is Israel (symbolizing again, the church) in apostasy.[4] The book narrates in vivid detail the resulting conflict between faithful and apostate Israel.

The Seals: Covenant Allusions

The seals unit, of which chapter seven is the climax, depicts the outcome of the blessings and curses upon the churches. First is seen the Suzerain on His throne, encircled with the covenant rainbow, entitled to worship because He created all things (4:2–11). The Lamb also is worthy of worship because of His supreme act of benevolence—dying to redeem His people (5:6, 9, 12). Since it was He who took them from every nation and tribe, and made them a kingdom, they respond in covenant loyalty and worship (5:9–10).

The Lamb then takes a book from the one "seated on the throne" (5:1, 7–8) and opens its seals one by one. As He does so, the future of the church unfolds in covenant blessings and curses. The white horse personifies the covenant blessing of conquest: the church victorious, going forth to conquer (6:2; cf. Lev 26:7–8—the covenant blessing of victory over enemies). Here are represented the conquests of the apostolic church.

The red, black, and pale horses are symbolic personifications of the covenant curses resulting from apostasy: sword, famine, pestilence, and death by wild beasts (6:3–8, note the summary at the end of verse 8).[5] Since the churches have not heeded Christ's warnings (Rev 2–3), they have become subject to the threats of sword and death (2:16, 23).[6]

Whenever the covenant curses go into effect, the righteous remnant also suffers (as did Daniel and his friends during the captivity). Under the fifth seal the cry rings out from "the souls under the altar"—those who have been faithful to the covenant, but who have suffered persecution from the apostate church. "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?" (6:10).

These faithful ones cry to their Suzerain for justice. As "Sovereign Lord, holy and true," He has pledged Himself to be faithful to His covenant promises.[7] The martyrs' urgent cry for justice becomes pivotal to the rest of the book.[8] To their question, "How long?" the answer is given, "until their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed as they themselves had been should be complete" (6:11, Greek).

From the text it is not clear whether their *number* or *character* is to be made complete, since the word *number* is not in the Greek text. In either case it is tempting to see in Revelation 7 the fulfillment of this promise. The servants of God are complete in number (144,000) and in character (they are sealed in covenant loyalty to God). The great multitude before the throne are clothed in white robes (7:9). They experience the ultimate covenant blessing: dwelling with God in His sanctuary (cf. Exod 25:8), that is, they serve God "within his temple" (*en tō naō autou*) as He spreads His tabernacle over them (*skēnōsei ep' autou*, 7:15; cf. 21:3).

Thus, Revelation 7 highlights the fact that in the midst of apostasy God has His true Israel, loyal to Him, who will withstand the conflict with evil and receive the ultimate blessings of the covenant.

Chiastic Counterpart

The unit on the seals in the first part of Revelation (4:1–8:1) is echoed by a corresponding unit near the end of the book (19:1–21:8). The first could be called the historical seals; the last we might term the eschatological "seals." The "historical seals" are numbered from one to seven; an equal number of "eschatological seals" are marked off by the formula "and I saw" (*kai eidon*). Hence it is possible to match them exactly. Within this structure there is a parallel vision to chapter 7 which sheds light upon it. This diagram is adapted from the literary arrangement worked out by William H. Shea.[9]

Chiastic Structure of the Seals

The Seven Historical Seals		The Seven Eschatological "Seals"	
Chapters 4-5	**Sanctuary Scene**	19:1-10	**Sanctuary Scene**
A throne with God on it. Four living creatures and 24 elders worship Him. Praise to the Lamb. Voice from throne, thunder.		Twenty-four elders and four living creatures worship One seated on the throne. Marriage of the Lamb. Voice from throne, thunder.	
Observations: Initially God is praised for Creation; at the end of time, for His work of judgment. At first the Lamb is praised for ransoming His people; at the end His bride is praised for preparing for marriage to the Lamb.			
6:1-2	**1**	19:11-16	**1**
White horse with rider who had bow and crown. He goes out conquering.		White horse with rider who has sword makes war. Has diadems on head.	
Observations: At the beginning of the Christian Era Jesus leads His church to initial victories. At the end of time Jesus consummates the victory over His enemies.			
6:3-4	**2**	19:17-18	**2**
Living creature calls "Come." *Rider* on red *horse* takes peace from earth; men slay one another. Rider has sword.		Angel calls "Come" to birds to eat flesh of captains, *horses and riders*.	
Observations: The church in apostasy (red, color of sin) brings in strife. At the end those who killed are themselves killed and eaten by vultures.			
6:5-6	**3**	19:19-21	**3**
Rider on black horse has balance in hand. Wheat and barley sold for exorbitant price; oil and wine endangered.		Beast and false prophet who deceived beast-worshipers thrown into lake of fire.	
Observations: The apostate church which caused a famine for the Word (wheat and barley), and threatened to obscure the Spirit and the gospel (oil and wine), is eventually thrown into the lake of fire.			
6:7-8	**4**	20:1-3, 7-10	**4**
Living creature cries "Come." Death on pale horse, followed by Hades, given power to kill fourth of earth by sword, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts.		Angel with key and chain seizes dragon, throws him into pit, and seals it so he can deceive nations no more.	
Observations: Satan, riding the apostate church, intensifies the work of destruction while his accomplice, Hades, swallows the dead. In the end Satan is himself thrown into the pit and confined there.			
6:9-11	**5**	20:4-6	**5**
Souls under the altar slain for their testimony to Jesus, cry out to God to avenge their blood on earth-dwellers. Told to wait; given white robes.		Souls slain for testimony to Jesus come to life and are elevated to thrones where they themselves do the judging.	
Observations: The souls under the altar are eventually elevated to sit on thrones. The ones who cried out to God to judge their persecutors are themselves given the power to judge.			
6:12-17	**6**	20:11	**6**
Sky vanishes like rolled-up scroll. Kings, generals, peoples, hide from face of One seated on throne and Lamb.		Earth and sky flee from presence of Him who sits on great white throne.	
Observations: Prior to the second coming of Christ the vault of heaven vanishes, exposing the wicked world to the presence of God on His throne and to the wrath of the Lamb. At the end of the thousand years the wicked world again stands arraigned before the throne of God.			
Chapter 7	**Interlude**	20:12-15	**7**
144,000 of Israel are sealed. Great multitude from every tribe stand before throne praising God for salvation. No more hunger, thirst; God wipes tears from eyes. Lamb leads to living water. God tabernacles over them.		Dead stand before throne; books are opened. Book of life opened. Dead judged by what is written in books. Death and Hades thrown into lake of fire.	
8:1	**7**	21:1-8; 22:1	**Interlude**
Lamb opens seventh seal (making it possible to open the book). There is silence in heaven for half an hour.		New Jerusalem descends. God dwells with His people; wipes tears away; no more death, crying, pain. Water of life for thirsty. The tabernacle of God is with men.	
Observations: The opening of the seventh seal removes the last barrier to opening the book. The silence in heaven for half an hour might apply to heaven's silence as the living are arraigned before Christ at His second coming. (This appears to be a judgment scene because its chiastic counterpart is a judgment scene.) At the end of the thousand years the dead are arraigned before the throne and judged according to the books of record. The book of life is also opened, revealing who are saved and who are lost.			
(The interludes.) Judging from the contexts, the time frame of each interlude seems clear. Revelation 7 depicts the security of the saints during the scenes connected with the second coming, whereas Revelation 21 shows the security of the saints at the end of the thousand years. Revelation 7 depicts 12 tribes of faithful Israel; Revelation 21 depicts the bride/city (marked with the names of the 12 tribes). At both events God tabernacles with them. They neither hunger nor thirst, for God gives them living water. Pain, crying, and death are no more; God wipes the tears from their eyes.			

The historical seals appear to begin at the ascension/glorification of Christ (5:6, 9) and terminate with the second coming (6:16–17; 8:1). The eschatological "seals" begin at the Second Advent (19:11ff.) and terminate at the end of the thousand years (21:1–8). There are judgment scenes both at the Second Advent and at the end of the thousand years, in which the rebellious world stands arraigned before God on His throne.

At the time of each event the righteous are secure. At the Second Advent they are already sealed (7:3); at the executive judgment, they are found written in the book of life (20:12, 15). Both "interludes" picture relief from trouble: In the former case, from the great tribulation (7:14); in the latter, from all the sorrows of life (21:4). Each time God provides relief by tabernacling with His people, wiping the tears from their eyes, and quenching their thirst with the water of life.

The Tribulation

Revelation 7:1–3 describes a time when the four winds of the earth are about to be unleashed to harm the land, the sea, and the trees. Verse 14 refers to "the great tribulation"—presumably the same event.

The great tribulation is first mentioned in Daniel 12:1 in the setting of the final act of the "king of the north," who goes forth with great fury to "exterminate and utterly destroy many" as he prepares to attack the "glorious holy mountain" (Dan 11:44–45). This is what unleashes the time of trouble or *tribulation* (*thlipsis* in both Daniel 12:1, Septuagint, and Revelation 7:14).

> He shall go forth with great fury to exterminate and utterly destroy many. And he shall pitch his palatial tents between the sea and the glorious holy mountain.... At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time; but at that time your people shall be delivered. (Dan 11:44–12:1)

John uses similar symbolism to describe the saints who are with the Lamb on Mount Zion having been previously attacked by hostile powers from the sea and the earth who had condemned them to death (Rev 14:1; 13:1, 11, 15).

Jesus also referred to the tribulation mentioned by Daniel, applying it both to the destruction of Jerusalem and to a subsequent long period of persecution:

> So when you see the desolating sacrilege spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place ... then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.... For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.... Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, ... then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven. (Matt 24:15–30; Mark 13:14–20)

Daniel identifies three occasions when the "desolating sacrilege" would invade the holy land or temple and attack the covenant people: (1) the destruction of Jerusalem (Dan 9:26–27); (2) the oppression of the covenant people when they would "fall by sword and flame, by captivity and plunder" for the "time, two times, and half a time" (11:31–35; 7:25); and (3) a final attack at the "time of the end" (11:40–12:1).

Jesus appears to blend these first two events, referring clearly to the destruction of Jerusalem (Matt 24:15–20; cf. Luke 21:20) and to a later, longer period of persecution (Matt 24:21, see also the "falling away" of verses. 9–10, an allusion to Dan 11:34b–35). Just as the presence of the Romans in the holy areas of Jerusalem marked a time for God's people to flee in apostolic times, and antichrist's seating himself in the temple/church of God (2 Thess 2:3–4) marked a time of great persecution in the Middle Ages, so Satan's final attack on the end-time church (Rev 12:17; 13:15–17) will precipitate the great tribulation of the last days.

Another reference to the time of trouble is in Jeremiah 30:5–7: "Alas! that day is so great there is none like it; it is a time of distress for Jacob; yet he shall be saved out of it."

Jeremiah was predicting the horrors of the Babylonian captivity about to afflict the Jews, in terms of Jacob's distress when he faced an attack by the army of Esau. Jacob's anguish, as he wrestled with an angel, has come to symbolize the time of trouble which God's people will experience in the last days.

Thus, the final tribulation is typified by several earlier troubles: the Babylonian captivity (described in terms of Jacob's anguish), the attack on Jerusalem by the Romans, and the persecution during the "time, times, and half a time" of the medieval period (538–1798). All of these events, mentioned in the book of Daniel, are characterized by enemy attacks upon the sanctuary and the people of God.

The final great tribulation is also referred to as the "hour of trial which is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell upon the earth" (Rev. 3:10). Earth dwellers could be the wicked in general, but may represent more specifically apostate Christians (see footnote 23). These will be tried and found wanting.

A study of Revelation 7 will reveal that God has made ample provision for protecting, nurturing, and comforting His people during this time. The great tribulation can be a time of special closeness to God if His people have made a habit of coming "boldly before the throne of grace" and praising Him during the crises of life.

The Sealing

Before the great tribulation comes upon the world, an angel is summoned to seal the people of God upon their foreheads.

> Then I saw another angel ascend from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads." (7:2–3)

While the saints receive God's seal, His enemies receive a mark upon the right hand or forehead, known as "the mark of the beast" (16:2).

> Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. (13:16–17)

Sealing or marking people and things had the following meanings in Bible times:

Character Likeness

The seal of God consists of the name of God upon the forehead.

> He who conquers, ... I will write on him the name of my God, ... and my own new name. (3:12)
> Then I looked, and lo, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him a hundred and forty-four thousand who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. (14:1)
> They shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads. (22:4)

The mark of the beast consists of the beast's name upon the forehead or hand (13:17). In antiquity a name meant much more than a label. It represented character. When God proclaimed His "name" to Moses, He described His character: merciful, gracious, slow to anger (Exod 34:5–7). Thus, the reception of the mark of the beast and the seal of God, consisting of the names of the beast and of God, denotes conformity to the character of Satan or God. In the final conflict everyone will bear the image of the demonic or the divine.[10]

Ownership

The sealing or marking of animals, objects, and men, indicated ownership. People were often sealed by marks upon the body: A servant's ear was pierced to show he belonged to his master forever (Exod 21:6); circumcision was a mark upon the body showing that Israel belonged to Yahweh (Gen 17:9–12). The high priest in the Israelite sanctuary wore a turban with a plate over his forehead engraved with the words, "Holy to the Lord" (Exod 28:36–38), indicating his special consecration to God. Since the saints are called priests in Revelation (1:6; 5:10; 20:6), the mark on their forehead suggests this dedication to God.

Isaiah described the joy of being marked for God. "This one will say, 'I am the Lord's,' another will call himself by the name of Jacob, and another will write on his hand, 'The Lord's,' and surname himself by the name of Israel" (44:5). Conversely, God engraves Zion on the palms of His hands (49:16).

The sealing, then, is a marking off of the people as belonging to God, His possession.[11] Similarly, those marked with the name of the beast are the property of the beast.

Protection

Sealing was a sign not only of possession but also of protection. Whatever is called by someone's name comes under the protection as well as the authority of the owner. The concept of a mark or seal to indicate protection is as old as the mark on Cain (Gen 4:15). The blood of the Passover lamb sprinkled upon the doorposts of Israelite homes was a sign to the destroying angel that he should pass over their homes (Exod 12:7, 12–13). Ezekiel's vision of judgment shows a writer with an inkhorn setting a mark upon the faithful to protect them from death by the executioner (Ezek 9:4–5).[12]

The seal of God is intended to protect the saints from demonic powers who torture men so that they seek death rather than life (Rev 9:4–6). Also the saints are protected from the seven last plagues, which fall only upon the beast-worshipers (16:2). The seal, then, protects the saints from defeat by the enemy and the judgments of God. It does not protect them from the wrath of the beast (13:15, 17). Similarly, the mark of the beast protects its followers from the persecution of the beast, but not from the wrath of God (14:9–11).

Genuineness

Sealing also indicates genuineness. In the ancient world vessels, houses, graves, and documents were sealed as a guarantee against violation or change.[13] The seal denotes reliability (John 6:27). Saints are sealed to make them God's own inviolable possession.[14] The seal on the saints guarantees their immunity to apostasy and their eternal security during the great tribulation.[15] Their characters are fixed in loyalty to God. As conquerors, bearing God's name on their foreheads, they nevermore go out of His temple (Rev 3:12). Being righteous, they are righteous still (22:11).

Significance of the Forehead/Hand

The forehead and hand as the sites for receiving the mark and the seal are significant. These terms are first mentioned in the Pentateuch[16] in connection with the commands of God: "You shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes" (Deut 6:8).

The context indicates that this means the total response of the mind, emotions, and behavior: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" in every activity of life, whether teaching or talking, sitting or walking, lying down or rising up (Deut 6:5–8). The forehead symbolizes the mind, the thought-life; and the right hand indicates the deed or action.

Both rival powers wish to control the mind and behavior. The followers of the Lamb all have the name of God upon their foreheads; whereas the followers of the beast have the mark on the forehead (indicating belief, allegiance) or the hand only (indicating forced obedience without mental assent).

God's Commandments in the Mark-Seal Controversy

A study of the mark of the beast (Rev 13 and 14) and the seal or name of God (7:2–3; 14:1) reveals that the commandments of God are a primary issue in the conflict.

God's law substituted by the beast's. The mark on the right hand or forehead (13:16) is an allusion to Deuteronomy 6:6–8, where God commanded Israel to bind His commandments (especially the Ten Commandments just reviewed, Deut 5) "as a sign upon your hand, and ... as frontlets between your eyes." This injunction the Jews literally carried out in the wearing of phylacteries. Hence, the mark on the hand or forehead signifies the writing of God's laws into the minds and behavior of His people. The use of the forehead and hand by the beast suggests a parody of God's command: the substitution of the laws of the beast for the law of God.

Issue: obedience/disobedience. In the Apocalypse, those who have the mark of the beast are set in contrast with "those who keep the commandments of God" (14:9–12). Hence, it appears that the mark-seal issue has to do with the violation of the commandments of God on the one hand, and the keeping of them on the other.

Antichrist power opposed to God's law. The antichrist power is cited frequently as being opposed to the law of God. "He shall ... think to change the times and the law" (Dan 7:25); he casts the truth to the ground (8:12); and he hates the "holy covenant" (11:28, 30, 32) which is based upon the Ten Commandments (Deut 4:13). In 2 Thessalonians 2 he is repeatedly called "the lawless one" or "mystery of lawlessness" (vss. 3, 7–9).

Fourth precept involved. The command in chapter 13 to worship the beast and receive his mark is countered by the command in chapter 14 to worship "him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the fountains of water" (vs. 7), an allusion to the fourth commandment: "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them" (Exod 20:11). The way to worship God as Creator is to observe His Sabbath in memory of His work of creation (Gen 2:1–3).

Sabbath: Seal of God's law. The Sabbath in the heart of the law corresponds to the stamp or seal of the suzerain in the heart of ancient treaty documents. The Sabbath is a sign or seal of God's authority as Creator, the sphere of His authority being "heaven and earth."[17] Sabbath-keeping thus becomes a seal upon the one who bears God's image, proclaiming God's absolute sovereignty over him and his covenant consecration to God.[18]

Sabbath: A distinguishing sign. The Sabbath is called God's sign (sign and seal are synonymous as in Romans 4:11). Its observance by His people distinguishes them from those outside the covenant.

> You shall keep my sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you.... It is a sign for ever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed. (Exod 31:13, 17)

> Moreover I gave them my sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, that they might know that I the Lord sanctify them.... and hallow my sabbaths that they may be a sign between me and you, that you may know that I the Lord am your God. (Ezek 20:12, 20)

End-time Sabbath reform. The book of Revelation points to a great work of Sabbath reform in the last days.[19] While the sealing angel of Revelation 7:2–3 impresses upon the faithful the external sign of their allegiance to God—observance of the true Sabbath—the first and third angels of Revelation 14 exhort the world to worship the Creator and shun the mark of the beast, that is, to keep the true Sabbath and not the substitute day of worship (vss. 6–12).[20] This is the final test which will determine the destiny of every human being. The next event is the appearance of the Son of man upon the clouds to reap the harvest of the earth (Rev 14–20).

Timing of the Seal

When are the people of God sealed? All through history God's people have had His seal. Jesus had the seal of God ("for on him has God the Father set his seal," John 6:27). God has put His seal upon His people (2 Cor 1:22); the Holy Spirit is the agent who seals, and possession of the Spirit is the guarantee of eternal life (Eph 1:13–14). The purpose of sealing is to make one secure for eternity, the "day of redemption"; but one can lose this security by grieving away the Spirit (Eph 4:30). Thus, it appears that the saints of all ages have been sealed. What, then, is the meaning and purpose of the sealing in Revelation 7?

Although God's people through the ages have been sealed, He has had special seals for special crises. For example, the blood on the doorposts of Israelite homes at the time of the Exodus was, in a sense, a special sealing. Just so, the angel from the sunrising seals the servants of God to prepare them for the greatest tribulation in history (7:1–3). The seal on their foreheads guarantees their fixity of character: righteous, they will be righteous still (22:11). The eschatological seal is their special protection during the final crisis. The mark-seal controversy in the last days has to do with a conflict between the powers of Christ and antichrist. Every individual will bear the seal of God or the mark of the beast, indicating fixity of character in the image of God or Satan.

Preparation for the End-Time Sealing

The best preparation for the sealing is contained in the message to the Philadelphia church, which correlates closely with chapter 7.[21] To this church is given the privilege of the open door (3:8)—the door to the throne room and her ever living high priest (4:4–6; 7:15). If it is hard for them to "come up hither," they are assured that the heavenly city comes down to them (3:12), giving them easy access to God.

This is a picturesque way of describing an active devotional life. The qualities they have which assure that they will be kept from the hour of trial (vs. 10) are that they cherish the word, do not deny the faith (vs. 8), and patiently endure (vs. 10). They are exhorted to hold fast to these qualities, so as not to lose their crown (vs. 11), and to be among the conquerors (vs. 12). No better counsel could be given to God's servants today.

Commentary on Revelation 7

Preceding Revelation 7 is a picture of a terrified world arraigned before the throne of God and the Lamb, crying out, "The great day of their wrath has come, and who shall be able to stand?" (the sixth seal, 6:16–17). Chapter 7 consists of two segments which contrast the preparedness of the saints with the panic of the doomed world. The first segment or vision (7:1–8) shows that only those who are sealed will stand in the day of wrath about to break upon the world. The second (7:9–17) shows the triumph of the redeemed as they come out of the great tribulation.

Verses 1–3

Significance of the symbols. Initially, four angels are pictured standing at the four corners of the earth holding back the four winds until the servants of God are sealed in their foreheads (7:1, 3). In apocalyptic thought angels have control over the elements (here over winds; also over fire and water, 14:18; 16:5). The four winds represent warfare and strife permitted by God and brought about by human agencies.[22] The winds are said to menace earth, sea, and the trees (vss. 1, 3), with trees especially mentioned because of their vulnerability to storm.

Symbolically, when earth and sea are juxtaposed, *earth* often represents the ordered world, or even the land of Israel, while *sea* refers to the Gentile nations that menace it as the sea menaces the land.[23] *Trees* in symbolism refer to powerful individuals and nations; grass to transitory human life.[24] Both are vulnerable to the calamities about to take place; yet the green grass and trees under the protection of God cannot be hurt (9:4).

At this point another angel ascends from the rising of the sun (meaning *east*) with the command to hold the winds until the servants of God are sealed (7:2–3). God's glory is often manifested in the east.[25] In contrast to the angels that *descend from heaven* lighting the earth with their glory (10:1; 18:1–2; 20:1), this one *ascends from the sunrising*, suggesting that the sealing work that he does starts in the dimness of dawn and increases in splendor like the morning sun bursting over the horizon. The character of God, secretly transforming the hearts of His servants, finally is emblazoned on their foreheads (14:1), giving the world its last revelation of the glory of God.[26]

Purpose of sealing. The purpose of the sealing is not to protect God's servants from danger or death, since many die under the persecutions of antichrist (14:13; 17:6). It is rather to secure them from the destructive force of the seven last plagues (16:1–2; cf. Ezek 9:6).

The ones to be sealed are already "servants of … God" (vs. 3), but their characters need to be fixed so that being righteous, they will be righteous still (22:11), incapable of compromise with the antichrist powers (13:15–17; 14:1). It is through the sealing work that the promise to Philadelphia is fulfilled: "I will keep you from the hour of trial which is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell upon the earth" (3:10).

In this passage the winds are held back—the day of the Lord is delayed—for a work to be done in the lives of God's people (cf. 2 Pet 3:8–10). Here is one factor that contributes to the apparent delay of the Advent.[27]

Verses 4–8

In his vision John heard the number of the sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel, 12,000 from each tribe. The name *Israel* recalls Jacob's night of wrestling with the angel and the new name he was given, "for you have striven with God and with men, and have *prevailed*" (Gen 32:28). *Israel* is thus a fitting name for the saints in Revelation, frequently called *conquerors* (2:7, etc.; 15:2; 21:7). The Israel of God all conquer sin from within and the enemy from without.

The church: Spiritual Israel. *Israel* must refer to spiritual Israel—the church—rather than Jews or Jewish Christians only, since the ones to be sealed are the "servants of our God" (vs. 3), those who are Christ's (1:1), Jewish and non-Jewish alike. Similarly in 14:1 the 144,000 are the followers of the Lamb, all who have His name on their foreheads. The New Testament repeatedly affirms that Israel's heritage belongs to the church.[28] It follows that *Israel* is coextensive with the whole church—the covenant people, faithful to God in a hostile world of apostate Christians and non-Christian.

Symbolic number: 144,000. The number 144,000 (12 × 12 × 1000) is based upon the kingdom number 12. The number suggests perfect symmetry and completeness as well as the vastness of the multitude of the sealed. Twelve is the number of ancient Israel, based upon the 12 tribes. It is also the number of the church, built upon the 12 apostles. The New Jerusalem, structured to represent both Old and New Testament Israel, has 12 gates with the names of the 12 patriarchs, and 12 foundations containing the names of the 12 apostles (21:12–14; cf. Eph 2:20–21). The dimensions of the city are in multiples of 12 (21:16–17).

The great square city is designed to accommodate the "hollow square" of saints who will enter its gates by the names of their respective tribes, 12,000 through each gate. This suggests that all who enter the gates of pearl will be assigned to a tribe, perhaps on the basis of character (see Gen 49 for a preliminary description of their traits). The blending of the tribes and the apostles in the structure of the city suggests the unity of God's church, Jews and Gentiles united into one (Eph 2:14, 18–22). The number 144,000 should thus be understood as a symbol of the unity, perfection, and completion of God's church—complete because the number has been made up (6:11).

Tribal listing. John's listing of the tribes is different from any other in Scripture (7:5–8). The names are not given according to age or station or matrilineage (cf. Gen 35:22–26). Judah takes the primary position, undoubtedly because Jesus has been introduced as "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" (Rev 5:5). Dan is omitted, possibly because of Dan's character—a serpent biting at the horse's heels (Gen 49:17), and because Dan became a center of idolatry in the northern kingdom (1 Kgs 12:29–30). These sins, however, were common to all of Israel. In noninspired Jewish writing Dan is associated with sin and Satan.[29] To compensate for the omission of Dan from the list, John inserts Manasseh, though he should be included in Joseph. In effect, then, Joseph's name is symbolizing the tribe of Ephraim, the descendants of his younger son. The irregularities in the listing of the tribes confirm the conclusion that the tribes were not meant to be understood literally.

Thus, the first vision of Revelation 7 pictures the servants of God about to enter tribulation (symbolized by the 144,000, vss. 4–8), and the second a great multitude coming out of it (vss. 9–14); but there is no description of the tribulation itself. That is described later in the book where warfare (12:17), a death decree (13:15–17), and much martyrdom are mentioned (17:6).

Verses 9–12

The great multitude. In the second segment of chapter 7 John sees a great multitude standing before the throne, praising God. In contrast to the precisely numbered 144,000, this group cannot be numbered. In place of the 12 tribes of Israel are people from every nation, tribe, people and language. The great multitude stand before the throne and the Lamb singing, "Salvation belongs to our God … and to the Lamb!" (vss. 9–10).

The multitude contrasts with the kings of the earth, great men, generals, and their hosts (6:15–17). The former delight to stand before the throne and the Lamb; the latter cannot bear the sight. The former are clothed in white robes; the latter seek to cover themselves with rocks and mountains.

Source of the tribulation. As John develops the seed thoughts introduced here, it becomes apparent that the kings and generals are the ones who war against the Lamb and His people (17:12–14; 19:18–19). They have caused the "great tribulation"—the destructive winds against which God's servants were sealed. In this battle the Lamb does the fighting—"the Lamb will conquer them" (17:14; cf. 19:15). The primary role of the faithful is to be with Him (17:14c). Hence they cry, "Salvation belongs to our God … and to the Lamb!" (7:10).

At this cry the heavenly host surrounding the throne fall down and worship God with a sevenfold ascription of praise (7:11–12). The salvation of sinners, costly as it has been, brings back to God a harvest of blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honor, power, and might. The outpouring of love that drained Heaven's resources surges back in a tidal wave of praise. The throne at the heart of the universe is forever made secure because only love has ultimate power and might.

Verses 13–14

The great multitude: Marks of identification. One of the 24 elders asks John to identify the great multitude and tell how they reached the throne room of God. John has no idea. The question is significant, and the elder proceeds to answer his own question since this group had never appeared in the throne room before. In chapters 4 and 5 the arrangement of the throne room is described: the throne of God at the center, surrounded by the four living creatures, the 24 elders, and the hosts of angels.

The 24 elders had previously praised God for the throngs from every tribe and nation who had been redeemed by the Lamb (5:8–9). Now this vast multitude appears before the throne, a new element in God's temple. The elder explains to John, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation" (7:14), elsewhere called, "a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time" (Dan 12:1). They endure the wrath of all the powers of hell; they conquer in the final conflict between the armies of heaven and the armies of earth (19:14, 19–20).

To stand in the temple before the throne of God they must wear priestly white robes. They are, indeed, priests to God (1:6; 5:10; 20:6). The white robe, symbolizing righteous character,[30] is essential for the believer, whether it is ordinary dress (*himatia leuka*, 3:18), priestly robes (*stolas leukas*, 7:9, 13–14, *stolē* being the favored word in the Septuagint [LXX] for the priestly robe),[31] or the wedding garment of the Lamb's wife (*bussinon lampron katharon*, 19:8).

The robe is obtained during this life (3:18). In the judgment it ensures the retention of one's name in the book of life (3:5). It is awarded as vindication for those who were unjustly condemned by earthly courts (6:9–11). The robe kept unsoiled in this life will be retained in the age to come. "They shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy" (3:4). All must wash their robes in order to enter the gates of the city (22:14).

Washed by the blood. The great multitude have "washed their robes and made them *white* in the *blood* of the Lamb" (7:14). John delights in such startling contrasts.[32] Garments washed in blood are mentioned in the Old Testament: the Lord comes in crimsoned garments; He treads the winepress alone and stains His raiment with blood (Isa 63:1–3). The idea of washing away scarlet sins so that they are whiter than snow is found in Isaiah 1:18 and Psalm 51:7. But to use blood for bleaching is unique to John. Perhaps a contrast can be seen here: Jesus stained His garments in our blood—He became sin for us—that our garments might become white in His blood—we become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor 5:21).[33]

Verse 15

"Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple." Their white robes entitle them to minister day and night in God's temple.[34] Thus the promise to Philadelphia is fulfilled: "He who conquers, I will make a pillar in the temple of my God; never shall he go out of it" (3:12).

"And he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them" (vs. 15, NIV).[35] This is a renewal of the covenant promise that God would tent among His people (Lev 26:11; Zech 2:10–11; cf. Exod 25:8). "My dwelling place [tent] shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Ezek 37:27). But in Revelation 7:15 the figure is a little different: He will tent *over* them.

The verb *to tent* in Hebrew is related to the word *Shekinah*, the glory or presence of God which rests upon His people as the sign of His presence, as the pillar of cloud and fire overshadowed them in their desert wanderings (Exod 13:21). Isaiah describes the pillar of cloud and fire as a canopy or pavilion spread over God's people to protect them from the storm (chap. 4:5–6).[36] David expressed a similar view in Psalm 27:4–5 in the day of trouble while hosts were encamped against him and evildoers assailed him, God would hide him in His shelter, under the cover of His tent. There in God's temple he would behold the beauty of the Lord (as do the great multitude before the throne). The Old Testament sources of Revelation 7:15 speak of being with God *during* tribulation. The verse suggests then in retrospect that God will spread His glory over His people as a tent to protect them from the storm, the great tribulation.

Verses 16–17

These verses are derived from Isaiah 49:10, describing Israel's return from Babylonian exile:[37]

> They shall not hunger or thirst,
> neither scorching wind nor sun shall smite them,
> for he who has pity on them will lead them,
> and by springs of water will guide them.

The hunger, thirst, and heat suggest the agony of Israel's previous death march into Babylonian exile. The great multitude experience a similar death march through tribulation, thirsting for God in the horror of His apparent absence. Then the Lamb appears to shepherd them to fountains of living water, a favorite Johannine theme.[38]

Drinking living water means satisfying one's spiritual thirst by coming to Christ for the infilling of the Spirit.[39] Jesus said, "He who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). In Revelation the springs of living water turn out to be the river of water of life (22:1ff.).

John draws upon rich sources in picturing Christ as shepherd.[40] "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.… He leads me beside still waters" (Ps 23:1, 2); "He will feed his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs in his arms, he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young" (Isa 40:11). In the Fourth Gospel Jesus calls Himself the good shepherd whose sheep follow Him because they know His voice (John 10:4ff.).

The text holds further surprises. "The Lamb *in the midst of the throne* will be their shepherd, and … will guide them to springs of living water." The Lamb's position on the throne speaks of glory and majesty; His work in guiding the sheep speaks of gentleness, servanthood, and self-sacrifice. Jesus reveals the majesty of humble service.

But while the Son of God serves His people, the Father Himself performs a moving service. Though He has always seemed remote, seated upon the throne, here He stoops to wipe the tears from the eyes of His people (7:17; cf. 21:4). This statement is drawn from the apocalyptic section of Isaiah (chaps. 24–26), describing the devastation of the earth under God's wrath, and His protecting love for His people: "He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces" (25:8).

The 144,000 and the Great Multiutude

There has been much speculation over the identity of the 144,000 and the great multitude in Revelation 7. The following is a review of the major views.

View 1—Literal Jews Contrasted With Gentiles

The literal-Israel view is held largely by dispensationalists. Dispensationalists believe that after the church is raptured, 144,000 Jews will be converted to Christianity and will evangelize the world, bringing the great multitude to Christ. The 144,000 will be protected from the tribulation by the seal, but the great multitude will be martyred, their souls appearing before the throne of God after they have "come out of great tribulation."[41]

There are serious difficulties with this view. Such a distinction between Jewish and Gentile Christians is not drawn elsewhere in Revelation. All the "servants of ... God" are to be sealed (vs. 3), whether Jewish or Gentile. The 144,000 are identified as those who follow the Lamb (14:1, 4), so all the faithful must be included. All conquerors have the seal on their foreheads (3:12; 22:4). The seal must be coextensive with the peril, and must therefore embrace the entire Christian community.[42] Furthermore, when John wrote, most of the tribes no longer retained their identity.

The idea that the souls of the Gentile martyrs (thought to be the great multitude) go to heaven at death is not supported by Revelation. The martyrs do not come to life until the thousand years begin (20:4). Until then they "rest from their labors" (14:13).

View 2—Last Generation Saints Contrasted With Redeemed of All Ages

Some hold the view that the 144,000 are the faithful who are sealed through the final crisis, whereas the great multitude are the saved of all ages.[43] Although this is a reasonable understanding of the text, careful examination reveals some problems.

Uriah Smith reasoned that the elder's question, "Who are these ...?" in verse 13 refers to the 144,000 rather than the great multitude. He asserts that John already knew the identity of the great multitude—the faithful out of every nation, raised from the dead at the second coming of Christ. So the elder's description of saints in white robes who came out of great tribulation must apply to the 144,000.[44]

Smith divides the chapter into three parts: the 144,000, verses 1–8; the great multitude, verses 9–12; and the 144,000, verses 13–17. Thus, the ones who come out of great tribulation (vs. 14) are the 144,000 who are sealed against the winds. The great multitude, as described in verses 9–12, can then apply to the faithful of all ages.

Most scholars, however, see only two segments in the chapter: the 144,000 (vss. 1–8) and the great multitude (vss. 9–17). This is because the elder's question and description clearly apply to the great multitude—they are the ones with white robes who stand before the throne of God (cf. vss. 14–15 with vs. 9). This understanding introduces the problem that the great multitude are no longer the faithful of all ages, but are limited to the ones who experience the great tribulation.

To accommodate this problem, some redefine "the great tribulation" as persecution of the Christian church through the ages,[45] or specifically the persecution of the martyrs in 6:9–11 (cf. Matt 24:21–22). The white-robed multitude then completes the number of the white-robed martyrs (7:14; 6:11). This accommodation weakens the meaning of *the* "great tribulation" (specific in the Greek), an allusion to Daniel's "time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time" (Dan 12:1).

View 3—The Same Group Under Different Circumstances

Numerous scholars have concluded that the 144,000 and the great multitude are the same,[46] the former being the end-time church militant engaged in struggle on earth, while the great multitude are the same group triumphant after they safely reach heaven. They reason that in the first segment (vss. 1–8) John *hears* the number of the sealed, but in the second (vss. 9–17) he *sees* who they actually are: a great multitude whom no one can number. The number 144,000 is symbolic of the vastness of the innumerable multitude.

The nation of *Israel* with its 12 tribes signifies the host of spiritual Israel from all nations and tribes. The sealing work is analogous to washing the robes and making them white in the blood of the Lamb. The winds let loose upon the world are a figure of the great tribulation. Thus the second segment of the vision is not a contrast to the first, but an explanation of it. In other words, the first scene (vss. 1–8) describes the church on earth about to experience tribulation; the second scene (vss. 9–17) describes it in heaven after tribulation is past.

This view is logical and faithful to the text. It solves the problems that come with a rigidly literal view of the 144,000: the arbitrariness of the number 144,000 divided into 12 equal parts, the smallness of the number in view of the size of the world church, the identity of the lost tribes of Israel, and the nature of the group as celibate males (14:4). Positively, it makes a powerful statement that Israel equals the church.

View 4—The Church in Tribulation: Spiritually Before the Throne.[47]

There is one problem the previous view does not solve. If the second scene of chapter 7 shows the church in heaven after Christ's coming, then the faithful of all ages should be present around the throne, not just the final generation. But it seems evident that the great multitude are tribulation saints only. Why then are the others ignored? Furthermore, they serve God "day and night within his temple" (vs. 15) though in eternity there are no night and temple (21:22, 25).[48] Also the elder does not say (in the Greek text) "they ... *have come*," but "they ... *are coming* out of the great tribulation."[49] Tribulation is still in progress as this scene takes place. Is there a dynamic here that has been missed?

There appears to be a recurring pattern in the Johannine writings that exposes more of John's startling paradoxes. The Fourth Gospel is noted for its concept of eternal life now, heaven in this life.[50] What is literal and real in the future enters the present as a spiritual experience. The same mode of thought appears in Revelation.

The saints will reign forever and ever (22:5), but even in exile John shares the kingdom (1:9). The river flows through the holy city (22:1–2), but the thirsty may drink of it now (vs. 17). God will dwell with His people face to face (21:3; 22:4), but now Christ enters the door to dine with them (3:20). Christ is coming soon with His recompense (22:12), but He comes now to His church (2:5, 16, 25). The holy city will come down from heaven to the new earth (21:2), but it comes down even now to the one who conquers (3:12).[51]

In harmony with this thinking, John consistently refers to the enemies of God as those "who dwell on earth" (13:8) while the opposing community of saints are called "those who tent in heaven" (13:6).[52] Living in heaven is thus a present experience. He also has frequent visions of the saints in heaven "before the throne," "with the Lamb on Mount Zion," "on the sea of glass" where the context of each passage indicates that the final conflict is still in progress.[53] He casually mentions saints worshiping in the temple during the 42 months of oppression (11:1; cf. 7:15).

Most interpreters see these as "proleptic" (anticipatory) visions of heavenly bliss. Certainly they are. There will be a day when the faithful will stand before the throne praising God. But the Johannine writings are noted for the *double entendre* (double meaning). For instance, Jesus said, "The hour is coming, *and now is*, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live" (John 5:25). The future meaning is clear—at Christ's coming the dead will be raised. But the present meaning is also there—spiritually dead people are now brought to life by hearing the voice of Jesus.

If a *double entendre* in Revelation 7 is understood, the passage becomes poignant with meaning. Since the great multitude are still emerging from tribulation (vs. 14), they have not yet reached heaven; they are there in spirit. Their exclamation, "Salvation belongs to God!" (vs. 10) becomes a cry for help. God responds by spreading His tabernacle over them (vs. 15). While under God's tabernacle they are protected from the fierce winds of destruction (vs. 1) and the searing heat of the fourth plague (vs. 16; cf. 16:8).

While the earth dwellers are battered by tempest and consumed by drought, the Lamb leads His followers to springs of living water, and wipes the tears from their eyes (vs. 17). For the heaven dwellers, tribulation is robbed of its terrors. They stand "before the throne of God," and "serve him" by their constant praise "day and night" during tribulation (vs. 15). The passage thus follows its Old Testament source: in the day of trouble when wars rage against him, the believer dwells in the house of the Lord, beholding the beauty of the Lord. "For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent" (Ps 27:3–5, cf. Isa 4:5–6).

As commonly understood, the first scene of Revelation 7 describes the preparation for tribulation, and the second scene, the deliverance from tribulation, with no mention about the tribulation itself. But if a double meaning is intended, the chapter tells how Christians cope with tribulation when in the heat of it—how they are kept from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world (3:10).

God has set before them the open door into the throne room (3:8). Through every crisis, as priests they press into the Most Holy Place to the very presence of God and the Lamb (7:9). Their priestly white robes washed in the blood of the Lamb entitle them to full acceptance with God (7:14). With prayer and praise they serve Him day and night in His temple (vs. 15). They overcome fear and despair through shouting God's praises (vss. 10–12). When the world is parched with drought, they follow the Lamb to fountains of living water (vs. 17b). When they are broken by sorrow, the hand of God wipes away their tears (vs. 17c). They transcend their troubles instead of being crushed by them because they view the overwhelming evils of earth from the perspective of the throne and the sovereignty of God.

Characteristics of the Sealed

Revelation 14:1–5 gives a further description of the 144,000 sealed saints:

Divine Names on Foreheads

They have the name of the Lamb and the Father on their foreheads (vs. 1). Earlier we observed that being sealed with the name of God upon the forehead meant to reflect the character of God; to belong to Him as His slave; to be protected from the wrath of God; to be genuine, not subject to change; to be obedient to the commandments; and to observe the Sabbath as the outward sign of allegiance to God as Creator and Redeemer.

Sing a New Song

They sing a new song before the throne (vs. 3). A new song in Scripture indicates jubilation for God's deliverance and victory. "O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things! His right hand and his holy arm have gotten him victory" (Ps 98:1).[54] A new song was sung by the four living creatures and 24 elders on the occasion of the Lamb's victory (Rev 5:8–10; cf. vs. 5).

The song of the 144,000 is described in 15:2–3 as the song of Moses and the Lamb, and celebrates their victory over the beast and its image. While facing the death decree of antichrist, they praise God for victory. Their singing is so powerful it is like the roar of many waters and loud thunder (14:2). "No one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand" (vs. 3) because no one has experienced as great a trial and as great a victory as they.

Redeemed From Earth

They are redeemed from the earth (vs. 3). Their redemption was secured by the blood of the Lamb (5:9).

Spiritual Virgins

They have not defiled themselves with women; they are chaste (vs. 4). The "women" are later identified as the harlot Babylon and her daughters,[55] and represent apostate religion. To be chaste means to keep oneself pure from apostasy, to refuse to worship the beast or receive its mark, even under pressure of death.

Followers of the Lamb

They "follow the Lamb wherever he goes" (vs. 4). Where He leads is described in 7:17. "The Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water." The caring leadership of Jesus contrasts with the harsh rule of the beast.

Since the above texts indicate a Shepherd-sheep relationship, they bring to mind Jesus' description of the relationship between Him and His flock:

> He who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.... The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.... He goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers. (John 10:2–5)

The "stranger" of the last days is the beast-power. The sheep do not listen to him, but follow only their Shepherd. There is comfort here despite the threat of death. The sheep are conscious of being cared for even though they may be suffering extreme hardship.

First Fruits

"These have been redeemed from mankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb" (vs. 4). In ancient times before a crop was harvested the first fruits were dedicated to the Lord as a recognition that the whole belonged to Him (Lev 23:9–14). The first fruits were brought to the temple for sacred use (Exod 23:19; Neh 10:35–37). Israel was called "holy to the Lord, the first fruits of his harvest" (Jer 2:3). Though all the nations belonged to God, Israel was His special treasure, priests to the world (Exod 19:5–6). Likewise the end-time saints of Revelation are God's special people, consecrated to Him for service in the temple (Rev 7:15).

There are two possibilities for interpreting the "first fruits" expression in this passage. One is that as God's Israel, the 144,000 contrast with the world in general (the first fruits have been redeemed from *mankind*, 14:4).[56] The other is that the 144,000, as the final generation of saints translated at Christ's coming, are contrasted with the faithful of previous generations who are resurrected.[57] This view can also be supported by the text, since the harvest of the righteous is described in verses 14–16.[58]

Truthful and Loyal

"In their mouth no lie was found" (vs. 5). This description is used a number of times in Scripture, either with the word *dolos* (deceit, cunning, treachery) or *pseudos* (lie, falsehood). The psalmist describes the righteous man as being without guile. He who dwells on God's holy hill (as the 144,000 on Mount Zion) "speaks truth from his heart" and "does not slander with his tongue" (Ps 15:1–3; cf. 32:1–2). Jesus recognized Nathanael as one such Israelite "in whom is no guile" (John 1:47).

Absence of guile is also a Messianic trait (1 Pet 2:22–23, drawn from Isa 53:9). It is significant that *lie* in the Apocalypse may mean more than common untruthfulness, just as *parthenoi* (virgins) means more than common chastity. One of the characteristics of the antichrist powers is deceitfulness (13:14). The saints are loyal to the God who is true (19:11).

Blameless

"They are spotless" (14:5). Spotless (*amōmos*) literally means without blemish or defect. It comes from the Septuagint (LXX) translation of the Hebrew adjective *tamîm*, meaning unblemished, whole, or healthy when applied to sacrificial animals. Later the word shifted in meaning from cultic perfection to moral and ethical blamelessness.[59] To be blameless meant to walk with God (as Noah and Abraham, Gen 6:9; 17:1), and thus to experience intimate fellowship with Him. The Psalms describe the blameless man as obeying God's laws, walking in His ways, seeking Him with the whole heart, and delighting in His will (119:1–3, 14; 18:22–23).

The use of *amōmos* in the New Testament follows a similar pattern. Jesus was the sacrificial lamb, without blemish and without spot (1 Pet 1:18–19; Heb 9:14). The saints are to be the same (2 Pet 3:14). "Spots and blemishes" are reveling, carousing, adultery, and greed (2:13–14). An obvious meaning of *amōmos*, then, is freedom from the sins of flesh and passion that characterize the worldling. Christ wishes to cleanse the church so that he might present her to Himself "in splendor, without spot or wrinkle ... that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:25–27).

The 144,000, with the seal of God on their foreheads, thus reflect to the world their harmony of soul with God and His law.

Some Theological Concerns

Several theological concerns surface from this study, not all of which can be definitively settled.

One People

Does the data of Revelation support the view that God has two separate peoples on earth, ethnic Israel and the church? The answer is No. Our study favors the view that the 144,000 (sealed out the tribes of Israel) and the great multitude (from all nations) of chapter 7 are identical and symbolize the last phase of the church. Elsewhere in the book John indicates that he has only one people in mind, not two. The woman clothed with the sun (Rev 12) has two roles. As mother of the Messiah, she is Israel; as persecuted people, she is the church. Yet there is one woman, not two. The New Jerusalem combines the symbols of the 12 tribes (Israel) and the 12 apostles (the church) into one city (21:9–14). The bride, the wife of the Lamb, is one. All this harmonizes with Paul's teaching that God has broken down the barrier between Jew and Gentile and made them "one new man in place of the two" (Eph 2:14–16). The church is composed of converted Jews and Gentiles trusting alike in the merits of the Messiah (Gal 3:26–29) and appropriately designated "the Israel of God" (Gal 6:15–16).

No Change in Plan of Salvation

Wherein lies the uniqueness of the 144,000—the final generation of saints? They are not the first ones to be sealed; saints were sealed in Paul's day. They are not the first to be without guile and blameless. They are not the first to be persecuted, or to follow the Lamb, or to be redeemed from the earth, or to "sing a new song unto the Lord." John's eightfold description of the 144,000 found in Revelation 14:1–5 indicates that they share a common heritage with the saints of all ages.

What, then, is unique about them? Does the final generation of saints achieve a level of holiness never reached before? Are there two levels of holiness, one for resurrection and one for translation?

At this point it is important to clarify some differences between justification and sanctification. In all generations there has been only one method of salvation: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph 2:8–9). God has only one criterion for salvation: faith in the merits of a crucified Saviour. Justification alone is our title to heaven. For God to change the requirements on the last generation would be unjust.

Having said this, we must also recognize that through the ages God's servants have experienced different levels of growth and experience. Some, like Joseph and Daniel, lived lives of extraordinary virtue and influence, with no sin recorded against them. Others like Samson and Manasseh committed horrendous crimes, repenting only at the end of life. Some served faithfully through the heat of the day, others only the last hour. None were saved by their holiness—sanctification is not the means, but the result of salvation.

It ought not to be a matter of theological concern if God should lift a whole generation to a height of holiness rarely achieved before in order to give to the world the last revelation of God's love. The 144,000 standing on Mount Zion with the seal of God illuminating their faces are that final witness to a world called to choose between the worship of God and the worship of the beast (14:1–12). Instead of a pitiful remnant—Noah's eight, Elijah's 7,000—God will have a full complement of saints to call the world out of Babylon.

The question regarding a state of sinlessness depends upon whether sin is defined as *act* or *nature*. The last living generation of God's people should certainly be free from sinful acts; however, they do not lose their sinful, corruptible nature until they put on incorruption at the Second Advent (1 Cor 15:53).

In the book of Revelation the saints are always *conquering* (marked by the present tense in the Greek); only Christ *has conquered* (the aorist tense).[60] Even during the seven last plagues the saints are still *conquering* the beast and its image (15:2, Greek). They still contend with the enemy without and within. Their greatest sin, which they must overcome *during* the tribulation, is lack of faith.[61] Yet they are *conquering*, not being conquered. They are victorious in the struggle with evil. They are perfect in character—they choose only God's will—while they are still conscious of having to overcome their sinful nature. However, they stand sealed and spotless through the merits of the Lamb (7:14).

Circumstances of the Final Conflict

What is unique about the great tribulation? What makes it worse than any previous one (Dan 12:1)? Ellen White emphasizes two factors: living in the sight of a holy God without an intercessor with the fear that not all sins are forgiven, and persecution culminating in the death decree—the second causing less anxiety than the first. To describe the anguish of the time of trouble, she draws heavily upon the experience of Jacob as he wrestled with the angel.[62] Her emphasis is on the struggle. Revelation 7, by contrast, dwells on the victorious emergence of the saints from tribulation.

Though the two pictures seem diametrically opposed to each other, they are actually two sides of the same coin. In times of crisis or anguish the greatest horror is to experience the absence of God. When God does not rescue, when He does not make His presence felt, when His only answer to our questions is silence, then the soul is overwhelmed with doubt, despair, and darkness. The great struggle of the time of trouble is to have faith in the simple word of God without any external or internal evidence to support it. This was the struggle of Christ when He cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" His triumphant cry, "It is finished!" was a victory of naked faith without any evidence except the word of God to support it.

If our interpretation of Revelation 7 is correct, it depicts the soul's ascent to God through faith. If we can rise above the horrors of earth to the presence of God, we can find the support of the whole heavenly host—there Jesus leads to fountains of living water and God wipes the tears from the eyes. The absence or presence of faith makes the difference between Jabbok darkness or throne-room glory. *To exercise this faith under the most extreme pressure is the unique experience of the final generation*.

Vision Objective

What is the overall purpose of chapter 7 in the book of Revelation? Undoubtedly it is meant to alert the church to its need to get ready for the final conflict. The winds of strife are about to begin their work of devastation. There is no time for delay. At the same time the restraining of the winds shows God's mercy in giving His people time to prepare. There is also assurance in the sealing message. The seal itself is the guarantee that the saints are secure. Once they are sealed their characters are inviolable, not subject to change, no matter how severe the temptation. The mathematical perfection and symmetry of the 144,000 indicates that God's plan for His Israel is perfectly realized, in spite of the events that rock the church and the world (6:12–17).

Whether one accepts the double entendre concept or not, the vision of the great multitude before the throne implies on the face of its language that God shelters and feeds and comforts His people throughout the great tribulation. And while Revelation 7 deals with the final conflict, it undoubtedly can be applied in principle to the lesser trials that assail the people of God throughout their earthly sojourn.

Chapter XIII

The Mighty Angel and His Message

William H. Shea

Editorial Synopsis. Revelation 10 comprises the first segment of a parenthetical passage occurring between the accounts of the sixth and seventh trumpets. This "envelope" figure is similar to that of Revelation 7 which lies between the presentation of the sixth and seventh seals. In both instances the "sides" (sixth, seventh seals; sixth, seventh trumpets) of the literary envelope shed light on locating the events portrayed between.

Important insights for the interpretation of this prophecy are discovered when it is compared with the imagery and subject matter of Daniel 12:4–12. On this basis the open scroll in the angel's hand is identified as the formerly sealed book of Daniel; the oath regarding the cessation of time is seen to deal with prophetic time; and the historical time frame for these events—portrayed symbolically—is determined.

Seven chronological relationships, drawn from the immediate context of the angel's oath as well as from Daniel, provide a solid basis for identifying the kind of "time" about which the angel swears and for locating in the nineteenth century the events portrayed in the prophecy. The scene is especially linked to the crucial year of 1844 and the closing of the great time span of the 2300 years (Dan 8:14).

With the nature of the time element in the angel's oath clarified and the historical time for his action determined, the fulfillment in the real life of the church may be seen in the Millerite movement—based on the book of Daniel—and the rise of the Seventh-day Adventist people with the commission to "prophesy again" from the prophecies of Daniel to "peoples," "nations," "tongues," and "kings."

The Mighty Angel

Section Outline

I. Introduction
II. Description and Identification
III. The Seven Thunders
IV. The Oath

Introduction

A Parenthetical Passage: Its Context

Revelation 10 comprises the first segment of a parenthetical passage occurring between the accounts of the sixth and seventh trumpets (Rev 9:13–21; 11:15–17). The other segment consists of a command to the prophet to evaluate the heavenly temple and the prophecy of the Two Witnesses (Rev 11). A similar literary pattern places Revelation 7 as a parenthetical passage between the sixth and seventh seals (Rev 6:12–17; 8:1). The connections between these parenthetical passages and their contexts provide an aid for their interpretation.

Revelation 7. The parenthetical passage of Revelation 7 deals first with an end-time event: the sealing of the 144,000 (vss. 1–8). Then follows a description of an event that will take place after Christ's second coming: the gathering of the redeemed around the throne of God (vss. 9–17). The descriptions of these two events, one occurring just before and one after the coming of Christ, are set in a textual juncture appropriate to the end-time of salvation history.

As a parenthesis these two scenes are described in order after the sixth seal depicts the coming of Christ, but they are really an integral part of the sixth seal. Thus, the activity of sealing describes the acceptance of those who, in the final generation of earth's history, will be received by Christ at His coming. The description of the great multitude of the redeemed follows naturally thereafter, a scene that will take place around God's throne following Christ's coming.

Revelation 10. As with Revelation 7, it is reasonable to expect the parenthetical passage of Revelation 10–11 to be found in a literary context appropriate to its contents. Its two major segments occur between the descriptions of the sixth trumpet at the end of chapter 9 and the seventh trumpet at the end of chapter 11.

Revelation 11 provides a more specific prophetic context for Revelation 10 than chapter 9, because it refers to the time when "the kingdom of the world" will become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and their rule over that eternal kingdom will be taken up (11:15, 17). While the sixth trumpet is more difficult to interpret, still it may be expected to lead up—in one way or another—to the climax of history that is announced under the seventh trumpet.

We may expect, therefore, that the events prophesied in Revelation 10 (and 11) should contain some connection with end-time events. This connection is made explicit in 10:7 where it is stated that the message proclaimed by the mighty angel relates directly to the time when the trumpet of the seventh angel is to sound.

R. H. Mounce captures the purpose of this relationship between chapter 10 and its context by observing that parenthetical interludes like this one are "literary devices by which the church is instructed concerning its role and destiny during the final period of world history."[1] The thrust of chapter 10 in this literary arrangement can also be seen from Mounce's comment that "each numbered series moves us closer to the end, not so much because it follows the preceding series in sequence but because it heightens and intensifies the final and climactic confrontation of God and the forces of evil."[2]

Literary Structure

Revelation 10 divides into three main sections. The first (vss. 1–4) contains two parts: the description of a mighty angel (vss. 1–3a); his first message and the seven thunders (3b–4). The second section records the oath that the mighty angel swears regarding the time when the mystery of God will be fulfilled (vss. 5–7). The third section describes John's visionary experience with the scroll that he takes from the mighty angel (vss. 8–11). Before proceeding through a study of each section, however, we should make a few additional remarks about the chapter's general thematic and literary features.

A thematic link running through the three sections is the mighty angel, his deeds, and his words. He is described physically in the first section and his descent to the earth is mentioned. That is followed by his call eliciting the seven thunders. Thus, in the first segment of this chapter, we find the appearance of, actions by, and an announcement from the mighty angel.

The oath of the mighty angel is the subject of the second section. In this we also find both word and deed. The action described is that of raising his hand to swear an oath. The words of the oath deal with an end to time when the mystery of God will be completed. In the third section the mighty angel again speaks and acts. His action is that of giving the opened scroll to the prophet for him to eat and digest. His words request the prophet to eat and describe his subsequent reaction to the strange food.

From this brief survey it is evident that the mighty angel is central to this chapter from beginning to end. No major section lies outside the realm of his activity. It is quite appropriate, therefore, to designate this chapter as belonging to the mighty angel, although the direction of his words and deeds vary. In the central episode (vss. 5–7) his words and actions are directed toward heaven, while in the first and last sections his words and acts are directed toward earth (vss. 1–4, 8–11).

Several literary ideas link the first and third sections, but only one specific idea connects the central section and the other two. For example, the "little scroll open" is mentioned once in the first section (vs. 2) and three times more in the third section (vss. 8–10). The angel is also described in both sections as standing "on the sea" and "on the land" (vss. 2, 8). The third connection is the voice from heaven. It is heard at the end of the first section (vs. 4) and the beginning of the third (vs. 8). In the first instance the voice tells John not to write what the seven thunders said (vs. 4), while the third section begins with a reference to "the voice which I had heard from heaven" (vs. 8).

The scroll does not appear in the second section, nor is the voice from heaven heard. The main connection between this section and the other two lies in the description of the angel as "standing on the sea and the land" (vss. 2, 5, 8).

A feature of the literary structure in the third section may be noted in passing. The two references to the sweetness of the scroll in the prophet's mouth and its subsequent bitterness are given, as J. M. Ford has noted,[3] in a chiastic order:

A	It will be bitter to your stomach (vs. 9a).
B	But it will be sweet as honey to your mouth (vs. 9b).
B′	It was sweet as honey to my mouth (vs. 10a).
A′	But ... bitter to my stomach (vs. 10b).

This minor literary feature does not make a major contribution to interpretation of the episode, but it does complement nicely the reversal in experience that the prophet had with the scroll in this symbolic experience. The final section is further framed by a voice from heaven that speaks to John at the beginning of the experience (vs. 8) and a voice that speaks to him again at the end telling him to prophesy again to the nations (vs. 11).

The literary and thematic relations mentioned briefly have a bearing upon the unity of this chapter. An older, critical methodology, espoused especially by J. Wellhausen and his followers, divided this chapter into multiple sources. In this, Wellhausen was consistent all the way from Genesis to Revelation. R. H. Charles has responded to this procedure with a thorough and persuasive review of the lexical and grammatical evidence for the unity of the chapter.[4]

For our present purposes, therefore, the chapter may be taken as a unified composition and analyzed from that standpoint. This is the position taken by most modern commentators on Revelation. The brief observations we have made on the literary and thematic connections within the narrative point in the same direction of a single author as evidenced by the chapter's overall unity of composition.

Description

The first three verses of Revelation 10 give a detailed description of the angel John sees descending from heaven. Six characteristics are given. First, a pair of descriptive modifiers that refer to the angel as "another" and "mighty." Then, two phrases that describe the adornment of the angel: a cloudy garment around his body and a rainbow over his head. Lastly, two phrases describe his face and feet (legs?).

Another angel. The identification of this angel in Revelation 10 as "another" (*allos*) angel is not especially significant, but it does contrast this angel with the ones who have preceded him. The term is applied to angels elsewhere in the book on various occasions. "Another" angel in 8:3 contrasts directly with the seven angels who took up the trumpets in 8:2. The second and third angels bearing messages in Revelation 14 are each referred to as "another" in contrast with the angel bearing the first message (14:6, 8). "Another" angel comes down to earth in 18:1 in contrast with the seven angels who poured out their vials in Revelation 16. Since this angel in 10:1 is "another" angel following the first six to blow their trumpets (chaps. 8–9), there is a contrast here with them.

A mighty angel. The angel in 10:1 is not just another angel, however; he is another "mighty" (*iskuros*) angel. Thus, he contrasts not so much with the preceding trumpet angels as he does with the mighty angel in 5:2 who called for someone worthy to open the sealed scroll in the right hand of God. The adjective "mighty" is applied to one other angel in Revelation, the one who casts the great millstone into the sea as a token of the fall of spiritual Babylon (18:21).

Of the three angels in Revelation referred to as "mighty," this one in chapter 10 is the most centrally located in the overall structure of the book. He is also the only one whose personal appearance is described in specific terms.

The angel's face. When John looks upon the face of this mighty angel it appears "like the sun." The most direct comparison with this type of language is found in the description of Christ at the beginning of Revelation (1:16), and in Matthew's account of the transfiguration of Christ (Matt 17:2).

As J. M. Ford notes, "In Revelation 1:16 the visage (*opsis*, not *prosōpon*) of one like a son of man appeared like the sun in its strength but the wording of the description differs considerably from that of 10:1. In the account of Jesus' transfiguration Matthew says that His face shone like the sun (Matt 17:2), but the other evangelists do not make this comparison."[5]

The description of the face of the divinelike being given in Daniel 10:5 mentions its glory in terms of lightning and fire, but the sun is not alluded to. Ezekiel 1:27 describes the glory of the upper torso of the person of God as resembling burnished bronze and flaming fire, but the appearance of His face is not singled out.

Rainbow. John sees a rainbow over the head of the angel. The only other place in Revelation where a similar phenomenon appears is the throne scene in which John sees a rainbow encircling the throne upon which God sits in heaven (4:3). Thus, the use of this symbol to describe the angel may imply something about his divinelike nature.

No rainbow appears in the vision of Christ in Revelation 1, nor is one seen around the divinelike personage in Daniel's vision (Dan 10:5–6). However, a rainbow does attend the person of God as He is being transported by His mobile throne in Ezekiel's vision (Ezek 1:28). The use of the rainbow as a token of God's faithfulness to His covenant with Noah is notable among the OT uses of the rainbow (Gen 9:12–17). Its presence in Revelation 10 may emphasize the extension of that faithfulness to include the NT covenant.

Making a comparison with natural phenomena, we may infer that the production of this rainbow results from the glory of the angel, especially his face, reflecting upon the cloud in which he is wrapped. As Charles has noted, "the rainbow is due to the light from the angel's face on the cloud."[6]

The angel's feet. The description of the "feet" (*podes*) of the angel seems to present a paradox, because the word "pillars" (*stuloi*) is used to describe them. Since pillars extend upward from their bases, this is thought by some to refer to the legs of the angel, not his feet. Charles notes that "*stuloi* as applied to feet seems unintelligible."[7] Since the Hebrew word for "foot" has a secondary extended meaning of "leg," Charles suggests the latter meaning has been taken over into Greek here. But even Charles himself has noted the weakness of his own solution.[8]

This word for "feet" occurs at least half a dozen times elsewhere in Revelation.[9] In all instances the reference clearly is to "feet," not "legs." The language used here comes especially close to the description of Christ's feet and His garment in Revelation 1:13, 15. Thus, there is no lexical warrant for translating this word as "legs," as the RSV does. It should be translated as "feet."

Our interest does not lie in understanding the angel's anatomy, but in determining the historical and literary locus from which this kind of language originated. A number of commentators have proposed a connection between these pillars and those pillars of cloud and fire that led the Israelites during their wanderings in the wilderness after leaving Egypt. Ford, for example, notes that the "angel's feet which are like pillars of fire are reminiscent of the pillar of fire in the Exodus narrative."[10] G. B. Caird has contributed a similar observation.[11] H. B. Swete suggested a specific textual relationship: "In *stuloi puros* there is perhaps a reference to Exod. 14:19, 24."[12] Since the Presence enclosed within the pillar of cloud and fire was God Himself, the employment of this kind of description for this angel emphasizes once more his divinelike character.

The angel's garment. The use of Exodus imagery does not stop with a consideration of the angel's feet. It continues on into a consideration of the angel's garment. He is described as being "wrapped in a cloud." After references to normal atmospheric clouds are discarded, we discover many instances in which clouds are connected with the person of God.[13] Clouds are a part of the language of theophany.

Thus, this kind of description emphasizes the angel's divinelike nature. But the connection of clouds and the Deity may be more specific. For example, coupled with the pillar of fire (in the Exodus) was the pillar of cloud—similar to that in which the glorious angel was wrapped. This association makes it easy to see a reference to the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud in the description of this angel. Both features come from God's revelation of Himself to Israel during their wilderness wandering.

The verb used for the wrapping of the cloudy garment around the angel of Revelation 10 (*peribeblēmenon* from *periballō*, "to put on, wear—of clothing") is not used in the Exodus account, either for God wrapping the pillar of cloud or fire around Himself or around Mount Sinai. It is used, however, twice in the LXX of Daniel 12:6, 7 to refer to the way the linen garment was wrapped around the divinelike figure described there, and it is used there in essentially the same form (*peribeblēmenō*).

The specific use of this same verb in a similar way, connected with a similar figure who does things similar to the things that the angel in Revelation 10 does, is one of the reasons why commentators have made a direct connection between these two passages. These connections are reviewed further below. For the present we may simply note that this angel already demonstrates relations to the pillar of fire and cloud in the Exodus and with the divinelike figure in Daniel 10 and 12.

Actions

Six major actions of the mighty angel are identified:

1. He comes down from heaven to earth.
2. He holds an open scroll in his hand.
3. He places one foot upon the earth and the other upon the sea.
4. He calls out with a loud voice that sounds like the roar of a lion (and this elicits the seven thunders).
5. He raises his hand and swears an oath by the Creator God.
6. He gives the open scroll to the prophet for him to "eat."

The last three actions form an intimate part of the major prophetic statements of the narrative. They are discussed in succeeding sections. We will review only the first three briefly at this point.

Descent to earth. Since the angel proclaims a special message upon his descent from heaven, it is evident that he is sent at a particular time to proclaim a special message on earth; he is a special messenger.

The uniqueness of this angel's work may be emphasized by comparing his activity with that of other angels in Revelation. For example, the angels in the court scene (Rev 4–5) are restricted to heaven in that portrayal. The trumpets blown by seven angels (Rev 8–9) have earthly effects, but there is no indication that they descend to earth to sound their instruments. The angels who pour out the plague vials (Rev 16) are more directly connected with earth, but even that point is not stated as directly as it is in Revelation 10:1. The angels who give three end-time messages (Rev 14) fly in midheaven; the other three angels described at the end of the chapter are more directly connected with earth through their participation in the harvest.

The most direct parallel in Revelation to the descent of the angel in chapter 10 is the angel at the beginning of Revelation 18:1 who comes to earth to give his special end-time message about Babylon. In the case of the angel in Revelation 10 it is a pre-end-time message that he gives. This directional activity emphasizes the importance of both of these angels' messages. As Mounce has stated, "the dramatic appearance of an authoritative figure from heaven stands in marked contrast to the immediately preceding tableau of man's rebellious idolatry and immorality."[14]

The use of the present participle "coming down" (*katabainonta*) indicates that John watched this angel descend.[15] This not only emphasizes that the angel came at a particular time to give a particular message, it also says something about the perspective from which the prophet viewed this scene. Various commentators hold that from 4:1 to this point John viewed the changing scenes as though he were in heaven. They generally agree that he now sees this scene (Rev 10) from an earthly perspective.[16]

Holding an open scroll. The second action of the angel is that of holding an open scroll in his hand. When he later swears his oath (vs. 8) he lifts his right hand toward heaven. Thus, we may assume that he held the little scroll in his left hand. No particular significance need be attached to this use of hands except to note that probably the right hand was normally raised to swear an oath.[17]

The nature of this scroll and its significance are of obvious importance to this prophecy. It is commonly pointed out that the word used for "little scroll" or "book" differs from that which is used in Revelation 5:1. That is a correct observation for in Revelation 5:1 the word used is *biblion* (book, scroll), a diminutive form of *biblos* (book), whereas in Revelation 10 the word used four times is *biblaridion* (little book), a diminutive form of *biblarion* (little book).

Biblion is the common word used for "books" or "scrolls" in Revelation, occurring 20 times. The more standard form of *biblos* occurs only twice (3:9; 20:15). *Biblaridion* (little book) occurs nowhere in Scripture other than Revelation 10. Regardless of the distinction between *biblos* (book) and *biblion* (book, scroll), therefore, the contrast between *biblaridion* (little book) in Revelation 10 and *biblion* (book, scroll) in the rest of Revelation is quite sharp and distinct and surely must be intentional.[18] The "book" of Revelation 10 thus stands in contrast to, and is not identified with, the one in Revelation 5:1.

It should be noted that the little book is already open when the angel descends. The book is mentioned before the angel places his feet on land and sea. This means the book was opened, presumably in heaven, before the angel was sent with his mission and message based on its contents.

Given the emphasis that this scroll is now open, it is reasonable to assume that, like the one in 5:1, it was sealed or closed until the angel's appearance. The use of the perfect participle to describe this openness emphasizes not only that the scroll had been previously opened, but that it was to remain open thereafter.[19]

At this point the discussion of the little scroll may be left incomplete without making a final identification of it. We will examine that issue more fully later on.

Standing on sea and land. The angel places his right foot upon the sea and his left foot upon the earth or land. This means, incidentally, that the hand with the scroll was held out over the earth; the hand held up to swear the oath was over the sea. Thus, the land and sea (combined in synthetic parallelism) can be taken to represent the whole earth. This angelic action, and the language describing it, refers to the worldwide extent of the proclamation of the message and the authority of this angel.[20]

A minority view expressed by Barnhouse sees the sea and land as referring to the Gentile nations and Israel respectively.[21] If this were the case then the symbolism results in a badly mixed metaphor: land representing one land (Israel) and waters representing other lands (Gentiles). However, the conclusion of the chapter regarding John's preaching to all nations again implies that no such distinction was intended at the outset of this narrative. It is preferable, therefore, to see the language of land and sea as portraying a picture of universalism here.

Specific Identification

Two views. There are two main views on the identification of the angel in Revelation 10. One is that this is a special angel of exalted rank. The other is that this is an angelic representation of God, more specifically Christ.

J. A. Seiss is among those commentators who have identified this angel as Christ.[22] Drawing comparisons with the angel's glory, cloudy garment, and rainbow headdress, D. G. Barnhouse also has identified this figure as Christ.[23] Ford has drawn especially upon comparisons with elements in the Exodus narrative to identify this figure as probably "the Angel of the Covenant, sometimes identified with Yahweh."[24] In his older work E. B. Elliott has urged the interpreter of Revelation 10 to "consider too the person announcing it; the same divine Covenant Angel, Jehovah Jesus."[25]

In arguing the alternate point of view, Charles has proposed that this angel may be Gabriel. He argues that this angel is not Christ because the use of an oath by God Himself is inappropriate.[26] G. E. Ladd holds that this is a purely angelic figure on the basis that in Revelation angels are only angels, and God is not represented as an angel anywhere in the book of Revelation.[27]

These two objections are not as formidable as they might appear. There are instances in the OT where God is stated to have taken oaths. Three of these have been cited above.[28] It is true that the word "angel" is used not specifically for God in Revelation, but the figure of Michael in Revelation 12 is both angelic and Christlike in character.

One should also take into account the origin of the imagery employed here. The pillar of fire and cloud imagery is drawn especially from the Exodus account. In that account Yahweh is the One who is said to have inhabited the pillar of cloud and acted from it (Exod 13:21). On at least one occasion, however, it is said that it was "the angel" of Yahweh who did so (Exod 14:19). This kind of connection could have been taken over into the imagery of Revelation along with other elements from the Exodus account.

Evidence for a Christlike figure. In favor of the identification with Christ, we observe that the four main characteristics of this angel are most commonly connected with representations of God. This applies to the appearance of his feet as pillars of fire, to the cloudy garment wrapped around him, to the glory seen radiating from his face, and to the rainbow seen over his head. All four characteristics occur in connection with descriptions of God elsewhere in the Bible. None of them are used exclusively for angels. If this is only an angelic figure, he surely has been endowed with extensive divinelike characteristics.

An additional point derives from a consideration of similar passages available for comparison. These are Revelation 1, Daniel 10 and 12, and Ezekiel 1. In these passages the main figure is divine. In Revelation 1 it is Christ. Ezekiel 1 identifies its central character as Yahweh. The figure present in Daniel 10 is certainly Godlike and more exalted than the angels present in the narrative.

Since these comparisons come the closest to the description of the angel of Revelation 10, and since these Persons are divine, these comparisons suggest that the figure present in Revelation 10 is Christlike, and not just an angel.

General Identification

Comparison with Daniel 10:6; 12:7. By the expression "general identification" I intended to evoke another relationship or link with the angel or divinelike figure in Daniel 10 and 12. Many commentators have noted a relationship. While some have described it in more detail than others, a survey of the commentaries has failed to turn up any instance in which this relationship has been denied.[29]

In his commentary on Revelation 10 Elliott referred to Daniel as "a prophet and prophecy here evidently referred to."[30] Of the relationship between the angels found in these two passages Charles observes, "our author (of Rev 10) had the angel described in Dan 10:6, 12:7 before his mind."[31] Leading up to his quote of Daniel 12:6–7, Caird connects Revelation 10:5–6 with that passage by noting that "at this point John begins to adapt to his own purposes an Old Testament passage which will figure prominently in many of his subsequent visions.... John believed that this prophecy of Daniel, along with other Old Testament prophecies, was about to have a new and richer fulfilment."[32] In his comment on this passage in Revelation Mounce notes, "It is Daniel 12:7, however, that supplies the interpretive background for this section."[33]

In addition to such general connections, commentators have also made specific connections between these two passages in terms of their details. In his comments on Daniel 12:7 A. Clarke noted, "this is very similar to the description of the angel (in) Revelation 10:5."[34] Elliott noted that in Revelation 10 "the same Covenant-Angel, Jehovah Jesus, that now brought with him, as his own proper investiture, the same glory as the God man in Daniel's earlier vision."[35]

Oath. The action of the angel of Daniel 12 and the angel of Revelation 10 can be compared in terms of their very similar oath. Of this relationship Elliott wrote, "Besides all which, it is most important (as will soon appear on our entering on the history) that we mark the parallelism of the act and oath, with that other just alluded to in Daniel; a parallelism so striking that it seems incredible but that the allusion to it must have been meant, and one imprest on the mind of St. John."[36]

Ford also comments on both the oath and the actions which accompany it: "The oath sworn in Revelation 10:6–7 reflects Daniel 12:7–9 where the angel clothed in linen swears with his right and left hands toward heaven that there will be 'a time, two times, and half a time' before the end of the wonders."[37]

Caird is concerned especially with the content of the oath. He notes that Revelation has added to the oath as it is found in Daniel: "John's angel makes one important addition to the words of Daniel's angel. He swears, not simply by the eternal God, but by him *who created heaven, earth, and sea, and everything in them* [author's emphasis]."[38] Kiddle also refers more to the words of the oath than the actions connected with it when he observes, "the angel's oath is an echo of Daniel 12:7."[39]

Sealing. There is also a reference to a work of sealing in both passages. The sealing in Revelation 10 involves the seven thunders; in Daniel 12 it involves the scroll of the prophet. However, it has been noted that the use of this kind of language in the context of an oath appears to have been taken over from the earlier passage into the later one.

T. F. Glasson has noted this connection: "The sealing here (in Revelation 10:5) shows the influence of Daniel 12:4 and 9.... The same chapter of Daniel has no doubt suggested the language here (in Revelation 10:6), a man clothed in linen, clearly an angel (quotes Daniel 12:7)."[40]

Ford has made a similar statement about the use of this phraseology and has observed that Swete took this phrase as coming from Daniel 12:4: "But the application of the metaphor to unwritten utterances is a bold innovation."[41]

Prophetic time. Finally, another important connection between these two passages involves the fact that both personages swear in their oaths about prophetic time. Since that element belongs to a discussion of the central passage in the chapter, its discussion is reserved until we arrive at that point in our study.

Unique Message

An examination of the seven-thunder passage discloses a problem of considerable magnitude (vss. 3–4). When the mighty angel called out, the seven thunders sounded. When they sounded, the prophet listened and understood them. After the thundering ceased, the prophet started to record their message. At this point, however, he is instructed not to write but to seal up their message. We are faced, therefore, with a message that was given but taken back.

Lionlike call. Analyzing the passage, we should note first that the thunders issue in response to a loud call from the mighty angel. The call is described as sounding "like a lion roaring." The figure of a lion roaring is used on occasion in the OT to convey the idea impending judgment.

Amos warned Israel of coming judgments with this kind of language: "Does a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey?... The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?" (Amos 3:4, 8). The enemy surrounding the suffering servant of God in Psalm 22 is described first as a "ravening and roaring lion" (vs. 13). After the beast has attacked, the servant pleads for deliverance "from the mouth of the lion" (vs. 21).

Mounce observes that the call or "roaring" is commensurate with the size of the mighty angel; the call is given with a deep resonant voice that demands attention.[42] Ford focuses on the quality of the angel's utterance conveyed by the NT word, "*mukatai* 'roar' only here in the Bible. Low sound, growl of thunder. Loud in volume and extremely deep but not actual words."[43]

Given comparisons with this kind of language employed elsewhere in the Bible, it is reasonable to expect that the angel's cry carries a connotation of judgment here.

Thunder Symbolism

In response to the loud cry of the mighty angel, seven thunders rumbled. We are not told from where they issued or who caused them. However, on the basis of parallels found elsewhere in Revelation, it is reasonable to take these thunders as having sounded from heaven. That being the case, they most likely would have sounded at the command of God. Thus, God caused these thunders in response to the angel's call.

The use of the number 7 implies that—like the seven churches, seals, trumpets, and plagues—these seven thunders sounded successively and not all at once. To discover what these seven thunders might represent, we need to examine the uses of the word "thunder" elsewhere in Revelation.

Aside from the three times the word occurs in the passage under consideration, it appears in seven other passages in Revelation. Three provide little insight; the other four are of more major significance.

In the three lesser important occurrences the word is used for comparative and descriptive purposes: once for the voice of one of the living creatures (6:1), and twice for the sound of great multitudes of redeemed in heaven as they sing songs of praise (14:2; 19:6).

In the four remaining passages the word for "thunder" may shed more light in our search. In all four instances the temple of God in heaven is described. Furthermore, these descriptions of the heavenly temple serve either as an introduction or a conclusion to one of the major lines of prophecy in the book.

In the first instance, the throne scene serves as an introduction to the series of seals (4:5). In the second instance, the thunders occur in the temple as part of the introduction to the trumpets (8:4–5). In the third instance, the thunders occur with the description of the temple that serves as the introduction to the major prophecies of Revelation 12–14 (11:19).[44] In the final occurrence of this kind of language the thunders from the throne and the temple serve as the conclusion to the vial-plague sequence in Revelation 16 (16:18).

In these four instances the word for "thunder" is found in a series of words with other associated phenomena. The complete list includes flashes of lightning, voices or loud noises, peals of thunder, earthquake, and great hailstones. As can be seen readily from this list, all these words refer to different phenomena that may accompany a storm.

These portrayals are in essence, therefore, descriptions of a theophany of God, acting as the storm God on the particular occasions described in these passages. The question is, What is common to all four of these occasions that would elicit this particular type of response from God?

Before dealing with this central question, some other features in these scenes should be marked. For example, there is a progression in the elaboration of the elements present in these lists as they are recorded successively through the book of Revelation. The first scene contains three elements; the second has four; and the last two list five. Thus, the reader is made aware of a crescendo in the accumulation of these elements as he proceeds through the book.

Although there are occasional inversions, these storm elements are listed in somewhat the same order in all passages. In the first and last instances these elements are said to issue from the throne of God in heaven; in the other two cases they are simply said to occur without so direct a connection. None of the four passages describe the phenomena as proceeding directly from the person of God Himself, although they are obviously under His control.

The common denominator that appears to run through these four scenes is that of judgment. The phenomena are seen to issue from God's throne at the times He sends forth His judgments. This is quite evident in the case of the trumpets (8:4–5) and the plagues (16:18).

The concept of judgment is likely in 11:19, the verse that introduces the prophetic scenes of warfare between the dragon and the woman (Rev 12–13) leading up to the judgment announced in Revelation 14. Since the throne scene of Revelation 4–5 also serves to introduce the series of seals (Rev 6), and since the seals can be seen as containing elements of judgment too, the appearance of the thunder and its associated storm elements can also be seen as connected with the idea of judgment.

If the thunders issuing from the throne in these four passages are connected with the judgments of God, then one might expect that the seven thunders heard in Revelation 10 would be related also to the theme of judgment. This connection has been noted by some of the commentators. Barnhouse, for example, refers to the seven thunders as the record of judgments against the rebellious.[45] Ladd refers to these thunders as premonitions of the coming judgments of God's divine wrath.[46]

Both Barnhouse and Ladd have called attention to the parallel between these thunders and the sevenfold thundering of the voice of Yahweh in the storm described in Psalm 29. In this connection it should be noted that Psalm 29 is also a psalm of judgment, and that judgment is sent from the throne of God in the heavenly sanctuary (vss. 1–2, 9–11). That the Canaanites are the target of the judgment brought by the storm is evident from the fact that, according to the geographical references in the Psalm, the storm never touches Israelite territory.

From these parallels found elsewhere in Revelation we would have expected the seven thunders to have announced a series of judgments if their message had been transmitted without interruption. However, the prophet was instructed to seal up the messages and not to record them. What does this mean? If nothing was ever to be known about them, then it would seem strange to have made any announcement about them at all.

Their announcement followed by their sealing should, therefore, have some prophetic significance and explanation. Several theories have been proposed to explain this turn of circumstances. One idea is that this constitutes a literary device to insert a sequence that is already well known to the readers. Another explanation would localize these thunders in heaven; therefore, no explanation was necessary to be given on earth. The preferable explanation, thus far, is that of Caird who suggests that these seven thunders announced judgments of doom, but that the doom was cancelled.[47]

Sealing the Thunders

The use of the verb for sealing to describe the concealment of the message of the seven thunders is unusual. Elsewhere in the book of Revelation sealing relates directly to what that action entailed: placing a seal upon an object or document. For example, we are shown the sealing of the servants of God in their foreheads (7:3); the sealing of the scroll with seven seals (5:1); and we have the instructions not to seal up the message of John's prophetic scroll (22:10).

In Revelation 10:4, however, the prophet is told not to write down what the seven thunders had announced, and in this manner he was to seal up what they had said. The problem here is that you don't normally "seal up" an *oral* communication.

A rather ready explanation for this unusual circumstance emerges from Daniel 12, the major parallel for the scene in Revelation 10. In Daniel the prophet looks on in verse 5; the glorious angel appears in verse 6; and the angel takes his oath in verse 7. If we go back to the instructions immediately preceding these verses, we find the command to the prophet to *both* "shut up the words" *and* "seal the book" (vs. 4).

The same kind of language is used in the Revelation scene, but in a dynamic, not a frozen way. In Daniel 12 the prophet *shuts up* the words when he *seals* the scroll. In Revelation 10 the prophet *seals* up the words when he *shuts* them up by not recording them. Similar instructions are given in a similar context, but they are carried out in a different manner to fit the new setting in Revelation. Thus, the solution to the problem posed by the tension between the two different kinds of actions described in Revelation 10:4 (seal up; don't write) appears to be provided by the original source from which this imagery is derived.

Thunders Replaced by Plagues?

Some commentators see a connection between the seven thunders and the seven plagues of Revelation 16. Glasson speaks in language that suggests that the seven last plagues take the place of what the seven thunders would have provided: "Reference to the seven thunders might lead one to expect another series of woes: the first thunder, the second, and so on. But this idea is not developed; and as we shall see, the seven trumpets are in due course followed by the seven bowls (chap. 16)."[48] Mounce refers to the seven thunders as "another series of warning plagues."[49]

The seven bowls are referred to as the seven last plagues, because they are the final judgments to fall before Christ comes the second time (15:1). In Revelation 10 we find seven thunders: judgments or plagues that apparently would have come very near the end of time, for they would have occurred in the time when the seventh angel was to sound his trumpet and the mystery of God was to be finished (10:7).

Had the thunders sounded at the time when they were announced—and not been shut up—they could well have been the final judgment plagues themselves. As it worked out, this was not to be the case. Their place was taken by the plagues of Revelation 16. We may put this relationship in another way: These penultimate judgments of the seven thunders were announced but recalled, only to be replaced by the ultimate judgments delivered in the seven last plagues. Is there a time in prophetic and salvation history when such preliminary judgments would have been announced but recalled? That question of time takes us to the next section of the prophecy.

The Position of the Angel

The central passage in this chapter is verses 5–7. It is central not only in terms of literary structure, but also in terms of thematic importance.

The first element mentioned is the stance of the angel with one foot on the sea and the other on the land. We observed that this type of symbolism represents the worldwide extent of the message of the mighty angel.

The new action introduced is the angel's raising his right hand to swear an oath. Since this was the manner in which oaths were made in John's time, the symbolism is drawn from normal human experience. The fact that the right hand was lifted to do this swearing (RSV) indicates that the open scroll was still held in his left hand.

The Open Scroll

Although the open scroll is not mentioned again in these verses (vss. 5–7), its presence should be assumed to be an important part of this scene. The fact that the angel raises one hand to swear the oath and at the same time holds the open scroll in the other indicates that the oath should be related to the contents of the scroll. This makes the identification of the scroll a matter of considerable importance if we are to understand the message of the vision.

Earlier we observed that the Greek word used for "scroll" in chapter 10 differs from that used in 5:1 and elsewhere in Revelation. Hence, the scroll in Revelation 10 should be taken as distinct from those other scrolls. The distinction tells us what this scroll was not, but not what it is.

Daniel Parallel

The best way to identify this little scroll is to compare its context with parallels found elsewhere in the Bible. When this is done, the parallel between this passage and that of Daniel 12 become apparent. Several similarities already have been referred to above. To these may now be added the action of swearing an oath.

Daniel 12 and Revelation 10 are the only two passages in the Bible that refer to angels swearing oaths. Both occupy relatively similar positions. The angel of Daniel 10/12 stands over the Tigris River while the angel of Revelation 10 stands astride land and sea. When swearing both raise their hands to heaven. In Daniel 12 both hands are raised to heaven; in Revelation 10, only the right hand is raised.

We note in passing that the right hand is mentioned first in Daniel 12 while the right hand is the only hand mentioned in Revelation 10. The obvious explanation for this difference is that the angel of Daniel 12 did not have a scroll in his hand; thus he could raise both hands. The angel of Revelation 10 had a scroll in his left hand, so he could raise only his right hand.

Identity of Open Book

This difference provides a direct way by which to identify the open scroll held by the mighty angel. Immediately preceding the description of the angel's oath in Daniel 12, reference is made to the scroll of the prophet Daniel (12:4). Daniel is instructed to shut up the words of his written prophecies by rolling up his scroll and sealing it. The sealing was not a literal sealing to authenticate his finished writing. Rather, it symbolically represented the fact that at a later time—"the time of the end"—the prophecies of his scroll would be opened to the understanding of those who would search back and forth in that scroll for its important message.

Now we come to the angel who holds a scroll open in his hand in Revelation 10. The emphasis upon the open state of this scroll stands in contrast to the closed state of the scroll of Daniel in that former time. This emphasis also says something about the time when the scroll of Revelation 10 was opened. Its opening, implied by Revelation 10:7, would occur in the time when the seventh and last trumpet angel was about to sound his trumpet. In other words the action of the angel with the opened book is an end-time event or an event which was to occur in the "time of the end." In one case (Dan 12:4), we have a scroll that is sealed until "the time of the end." In the other case (Rev 10:2, 5–7) we have a scroll that has been opened in the end of time.

Even though it is used in different ways in the two passages, the verb "to seal" strengthens the link between them, because it is found in the immediate context of the oaths of the angels. This evidence, and more to come below, points us in the direction of identifying the open scroll in the hand of the angel with the scroll of the prophet Daniel that he was instructed to seal closed until "the time of the end" (Dan 12:4).

Swearing by the Titles of God

After raising their hands both the angel of Daniel 12 and of Revelation 10 begin with an identification of the God by whom they are swearing their oaths. There is a direct similarity between oaths at this point. This can be demonstrated by placing the initial parts of the oaths side by side:

Daniel 12:7	Revelation 10:6
and I heard him swear by him who lives for ever …	and [he] swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, …

Both oaths begin by identifying God as eternal, but in addition the oath in Revelation acknowledges God as Creator. Thus, there is a direct relationship here, but there is also an elaboration in the latter instance. The elaboration about the Creator has links to other passages in Revelation, most notably the Creator hymn in 4:11 and the first angel's message in 14:6. The link with the former is more thematic in nature; the link with the latter is more directly lexical.

Some commentators have called attention to this part of the oath and its significance. Ladd has observed, "The angel announces the imminence of the end in the name of the eternal God, who is also Creator and Lord of all creation. In other words, the imminent end will occur because God is the eternal and sovereign one who ultimately rules and overrules all things in His universe."[50]

Caird, noting the stress that is put upon Creation, holds that the secret purpose of God referred to next involves going back to the original Creation.[51] Ford points out that "there is an echo of the commandments" (Exod 20:11) in the oath.[52] This is an accurate observation, for the fourth commandment does contain the same three elements of heaven, earth, and sea in the same order. The qualifying phrase "and all that in them is" is added only after the third item in Exodus 20, but here in the angel's oath it is added after each of the three listed areas.

To summarize this part of the discussion of the oath two main points may be made: First, there is sufficient similarity between the initial parts of the oaths in Daniel 12 and Revelation 10 to indicate that they are directly related. Second, an emphasis has been added upon God as Creator in the oath of Revelation, and the language used in this emphasis comes most directly from the fourth precept of the Ten Commandments.

The Mighty Angel's Message

Section Outline

I. Introduction
II. Prophetic Prouncement About Time
III. The Bittersweet Book
IV. Historical Fulfillment
V. Conclusions

Introduction

Following the identification of the God in whose name the oath is sworn, the angel of Revelation 10 makes a statement about time. In older versions his words are translated, "there should be time no longer" (KJV); in more recent versions it is translated, "there should be no more delay" (RSV).

In either translation it is evident that the angel's solemn oath deals with time. In order to determine the intent of this expression it will be necessary for us to examine its phraseology from a number of different points of view: lexical, contextual, parallels, and historico-prophetic fulfillment.

Prophetic Pronouncement About Time

Definition and Use of *Chronos* (Time)

The word translated "time" in the KJV and "delay" in the RSV is *chronos* (time). The idea that this occurrence of *chronos* should be translated "delay" is found not only in some modern versions, but to a considerable extent in current commentary literature. Ladd notes, for example, "What the angel announces is that there will be no more time intervening before the coming of the end. The consummation will be no longer delayed; the prayers of the saints are about to be answered."[1] Barnhouse adds the idea that there will be no more delay until the blowing of the seventh trumpet.[2] Given the prominence of this view about the translation of *chronos*, we must ask ourselves what is the most accurate way to treat it?

A basic starting point for determining the translation of *chronos* should begin with its use in Revelation. Besides this occurrence in 10:6, *chronos* is found in three other passages in Revelation. In 2:21 it refers to the time given to Jezebel to repent. In 6:11 it refers to the additional time the martyrs were to rest under the fifth seal. In 20:3 it refers to the little time that Satan is given after he is loosed at the end of the millennium. In the latter two cases this word for "time" is modified by the word *mikros* for "little." In the five other instances in Revelation where the English word "time" occurs, the translated Greek word is *kairos*, not *chronos*.[3]

Thus none of the instances where *chronos* is used in Revelation supply the idea of delay. To employ that meaning in 10:6 lacks support in the usage of the author and can only be seen as an arbitrary case of special pleading. An additional point against that kind of translation may be drawn from the manner in which this word functions in its own language. As Elliot pointed out long ago,[4] the verb *chronizo* can mean "to delay," but the substantive *chronos* is not used that way.

From these considerations it appears that the more popular, recent translation and interpretation of this word as "delay" is not justified in 10:6. The older translation should be retained ("there should be time no longer," KJV).

Contextual Time Elements

We refer to time elements found in Revelation outside chapter 10. These are located or stated in such a way as to provide a kind of framework for our statement about time in Revelation 10. Three of these appear. One immediately precedes in chapter 9, and one follows in chapter 11. The third statement occurs in the fifth seal in chapter 6. The connection in this latter case is made by the theme and language used.

Revelation 6:11. This passage symbolically depicts a group of martyrs under the altar upon the opening of the fifth seal. They have a burning question, and that question is, How long is the current state of affairs going to continue? "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?" In answer to their question and appeal each one of them is given a white robe and told to wait a little time (*chronos*) until the number of their brethren is complete.

Discussing the statement made about "time" or "delay" in chapter 10, Barnhouse suggests that the answer to the martyrs' question, "How long?" (6:10–11) is given by the mighty angel (10:6).[5] Ladd likewise thinks that the statement made in 10:6 indicates that "the prayers of the saints (in 6:10–11) are about to be answered."[6]

A good case can be made for this view on lexical grounds. The word used in both passages is *chronos*. In 6:11 the saints are told to rest a little more *chronos*; in 10:6 the angel states that there shall be no more *chronos*. If these two statements are connected, then the first would give something of a time frame for the second.

The martyr scene occurs under the fifth seal, and appears to refer to the great persecution of the Middle Ages. According to the historicist school of interpretation this era of persecution closed by the end of the eighteenth century. The opening of the sixth seal that follows refers to the second coming of Christ and the signs that immediately precede it. The statement by the angel in Revelation 10 regarding "time," therefore, should fall somewhere between these two points (the end of the Medieval persecution and the Second Advent) elaborated under the fifth and sixth seals.

Note should be taken of what the martyrs request (6:10). They ask how long it will be before God judges and avenges their deaths. It is possible that the judging and the avenging are one and the same action. The other alternative is that they are successive. In this case the judging would be judicial in character, while the avenging would be executive in character.

A suggestion in support of a two-phase sequence may be found at the end of verse 11 where the process of making up the number of the saints is hinted. To make up such a number would require some sort of decision-making process. Thus the *time* referred to here (that they should rest, literally, "a little time") may be the *time* for the commencement and duration of the decision-making process. Such a judgment ultimately would result in avenging the blood of the saints and in ushering them into God's eternal kingdom.

Revelation 9:15. If one is looking for statements about time in the immediate context of Revelation 10 then the nearest preceding quantified statement of that nature is found with the time prophecy under the sixth trumpet, in Revelation 9:15. Since the specified amount of time referred to there is applied to events under the sixth trumpet, the angel of Revelation 10 could not have said that time—literal or prophetic—should be no more until after the conclusion of this time period. This raises the question of the historical period to which that prophetic time span should be applied.

A number of Seventh-day Adventist commentators have found in this prophecy a description of the attack of the Ottoman Turks upon Christendom.[7] The details of these applications cannot be explored here, but suffice it to say that in general the principle present in these applications seems correct, the political power envisioned has been identified correctly. The time period associated with this prophecy, however, does not yet appear to have been understood correctly. A more accurate assessment of it may lend further support to the correctness of this overall interpretation.

Applying the year-day principle[8] to the time period found in Revelation 9:15 provides 360 historical years for the prophetic year (compare Revelation 11:2–3; 12:6, 14 for the fact that a prophetic year consists of 360 days), 30 more historical years for the prophetic month, and one additional year for the prophetic day in this time statement. This gives a total of 391 historical years to deal with thus far. The question then is what to do with "the hour" with which this statement about time begins. Since the word for "hour" may not be so specific in terms of historical fulfillment, elsewhere in Revelation, it need not be taken as part of the chronological equation here. Those other time elements bring us to the time or "hour" when this prophecy would culminate.

If one looks for the major event with which the assault of the Ottoman Turks on Christendom began, one surely would look to the fall of Constantinople as the event which marked the opening of the flood of Turks on the continent of Europe, and that flood eventually washed right up to the gates of Vienna. The fall of Constantinople led to a distribution of written works across Europe that aided the Renaissance and the fall of that city was considered a landmark event by Christians who lived in Europe at the time. This occurred in 1453. Three hundred ninety-one years from that time takes one to 1844. This was the year the Sublime Porte issued his edict of toleration prohibiting citizens of the Turkish empire to persecute or kill Christians because of their faith. Since this was a prophetic period during which members of mankind were to be killed, the cessation of this type of activity (by the power that had carried out that kind of activity previously) fits the specifications of this prophecy very well. The time period also fits the nature of this event very well, from 1453 when the killing began at Constantinople until 1844, 391 years later, when this type of killing came to be prohibited.

The conclusion reinforces the impression of the overall correctness of this interpretation of the prophecy, both with respect to its application to the political power involved and with regard to the accuracy of the time period alloted to it to do the work ascribed to it. All of this came to an end on March 21, 1844. Not until that point could the angel of Revelation 10 say that there should be time no longer, for the prophetic and historical time period of Revelation 9:15 was still running until then.

Anytime after the conclusion of this prophetic time period, however, it would have been appropriate for the angel to have made such a statement according to this part of the chronological framework which surrounds the prophecy of Revelation 10. In this case the word *chronos* used in 10:6 is also particularly appropriate. If one were to mention the days, months, and years of 9:15 over again (in order to say that there would be no more of them hereafter), it would have led to a rather complex statement. Instead, all these time elements are subsumed under the heading of *chronos*, and it includes all of them collectively.

Revelation 11:2–3, 9, 11. The main narrative of Revelation 11 is paired with that of Revelation 10 to form the parenthetical material between the presentations of the sixth and seventh trumpets. Because these two units are paired in this manner, we may expect some kind of relationship between the contents of their prophecies and the way they treat prophetic time.

The time periods given in Revelation 11 are specific. There is a long and a short period. The long time period is given twice: as 42 months (11:2) and as 1260 days (11:3). The short time period is given twice later in the chapter as 3½ days (11:9, 11). The longer symbolic time element is of more importance to us because it obviously represents a much longer period of time than the 3½ days symbol.

Of central importance to this narrative and the longer time element is the state of God's witnesses testifying in sackcloth. In terms of historical fulfillment this fits well with the Dark Ages during which the truth of God was obscured in spiritual darkness while the saints of God underwent persecution predicted also for the the same 1260-day period in the next chapter (Rev 12:6, 14). The year-day principle applied to this time span provides a period of 1260 years for this era of spiritual darkness and persecution. This fits well with the historical markers that have been proposed to demarcate this period: extending from the mid-sixth century to the late eighteenth century, or 538 to 1798 in more specific chronological terms.[9]

For our purpose it does not really matter whether the 3½ days or years occur at the end of this time span or shortly thereafter. The net effect is the same, namely, that the two time periods of Revelation 11 come to an end by the beginning of the nineteenth century. Revelation 11 thus provides a marker *before which* the angel of Revelation 10 could not have sworn his oath that "there should be time no longer" (KJV). The time periods of Revelation 11 were still running on the prophetic clock. Only at some point after they had finished could the angel truly sware to his announcement.

Parallel Time

Daniel 12. Comparisons have been drawn between Daniel 12 and Revelation 10 at various points in the preceding discussion. We come now to one more comparison: their mutual interest in "time." For example, the angel of Daniel 12 swears that "the shattering of the power of the holy people" would come to an end after "a time, two times, and half a time" (Dan 12:7, RSV). On the other hand the angel of Revelation 10 swears that time should be no longer. Since so many other aspects of these narratives correspond, it is only natural to expect that these time elements are related in some way.

The relationship has been noted by a number of commentators. Among older works, M. Habershon wrote in 1841, "It would now express my own conviction that the assertion here brought forward relates to the same thing, the only difference being that the one expresses this period of 1260 years as future, 'it shall be for a time, times, and an half'; while the other expresses it as past—'time shall be no longer.' "[10]

In 1854 P. S. Desprez noted, "Both predictions relate to the same time; the one is but the echo of the other."[11] In 1884 P. W. Grant wrote, "The oath, too, is quite of the same nature—nay, as already suggested, it is the very same oath, only referring in one case to the whole time of anti-Christian oppression, … and referring in the other to the close of the same sad period."[12]

Clarke's commentary is more tentative: "This is very similar to the description of the angel. Revelation 10:5, 6, and in the seventh verse there seems to be a reference to this prophecy, 'a time and times, and a half.' "[13]

This relationship has also been noted by more recent commentaries. In his work published in 1940 M. Kiddle wrote, "in reality the angel is speaking of precisely the same period as that mentioned in Daniel."[14]

While modern commentators continue to note the relationship between these two statements about time, they have, in some cases, turned the relationship around. They argue that the announcement in Revelation 10 indicates that the 3½ times of Daniel's persecution is to begin, not end. Caird expresses this view: "John believed that the prophecy of Daniel, along with other Old Testament prophecies, was about to have a new and richer fulfilment. The three and a half years were about to start …; and he interpreted the last sentence of the angel's words to Daniel to mean that with the destruction of the persecutor the *secret purpose of God will have been accomplished* [author's emphasos]. The persecution of the church is thus the secret weapon by which God intends to win his victory over the church's persecutors and to achieve his purpose of redemption. It is also the content of the *little scroll*."[15]

The older viewpoint, that puts the announcement of the angel of Revelation 10 at the *end* of the time period announced by the angel of Daniel 12, appears to be superior to the modern view that would invert these relationships. The more recent view is based in part upon the application of Daniel's prophecy to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes (second century B.C). Thus the use of this time period in Revelation becomes a reapplication, not the original intent of the prophecy.

In the historicist view, however, Daniel's prophecy looks farther down in time than just the second century B.C. Indeed, it extends into the Christian Era when this persecution was to take place. The application of the year-day principle to this time period indicates that an announcement about it in Revelation should refer to its conclusion rather than its commencement.

The same point is borne out by the context in Revelation 10. The oath expressed there was to find its fulfillment in the time when the seventh angel was going to sound his trumpet, clearly an end-time event. Thus, the conclusion of older historicist commentators seems more sound on this point than does the modern critical approach.

These commentators, whether they have written in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries, have made a direct connection between the end of time in Revelation 10:6 and the 3½ times in Daniel 12:7. While this general conclusion is undoubtedly correct, there is one flaw in making the application so specific. This flaw has arisen from a failure to give attention to the specific Greek word employed. In the Septuagint of Daniel 12:7 (the third-second century B.C. Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, commonly designated as the LXX) the word used for 3½ "times" is *kairos*, whereas the word used in Revelation 10:6 is *chronos*. English Bibles do not bring out the distinction that is present in these Greek terms.

This is one instance in which we can be quite sure that a distinction was intended by the author. This is evidenced by the fact that the identical time period, drawn from Daniel 12:7, appears in Revelation 12:14 and employs the same word *kairos* as found in the LXX of Daniel. It seems clear, therefore, that John intended to use a different word in Revelation 10:6 than he used in 12:14 or the LXX used in Daniel 12:7. But John still used a word that referred to time (*chronos*). Why should this distinction be present in the text?

An answer to this question may be inferred from other data in Daniel 12. Following the oath about the 3½ times, the angel takes up the subject of the abomination of desolation. Its duration, he said, would last 1290 days (vs. 11). And he continues by pronouncing a blessing on those who will come to the 1335 days (vs. 12).

Thus, at the end of Daniel 12 two additional time periods are mentioned by the same angel. In the latter instances, however, the time periods are given in different units; instead of "times," the unit employed is "days."

If the angel of Revelation 10 had intended to refer only to the 3½ times of Daniel 12:7, he should have used the word *kairos*. But Daniel 12 contains two longer prophetic time periods in addition to the 3½ *kairoi*. To accommodate these other references to time (given in "days"), a different word from *kairos* would have to be used. While *kairos* could refer to only one of the three time periods in Daniel 12, *chronos* fits well as an overarching term, covering both the time units given in *kairos* and those given in "days." Thus, the distinctiveness for *chronos* in Revelation 10:6 is that it functions to incorporate the three time periods of Daniel 12 into its frame of reference.

Since the angel's oath (10:6) appears to include the three time prophecies in Daniel 12, some attention should be given to their historical fulfillment. The 3½ times (vs. 7) refers to the same era as given in Daniel 7:25. Both passages met their fulfillment in the persecution that extended through the Dark Ages—from 538 to 1798.[16]

The "abomination of desolation" (vs. 11) was set up by the same power carrying out that persecution (cf. Dan 11:31 and 8:11–12). Since the dominion of that power was to come to a temporary end at the time the persecution was over (7:25), so also in this parallel prophecy (12:11) the manifestation of the abomination of desolation would end at the same time as the persecution. This is but another way to say that the 3½ times or 1260 days should end together with the 1290 days, both in 1798. Figuring backwards, not forward, means that the manifestation of its power began in 508.

The final time period of Daniel 12, the 1335 days, is given in the same type of time unit as the immediately preceding 1290 days. It is reasonable, therefore, to assume that both run together. This means the 1335 days extend 45 day-years beyond the end of the 1290 day-years in 1798, or to 1843.

It should be noted here that we are dealing with historical events in western Europe that are measured off by the Roman Julian-Gregorian calendar that begins each year in January and ends in December.

The time prophecies of Daniel 8 and 9, however, have been figured according to the Jewish fall-to-fall calendar because that was the calendar functioning in the place and time when these time periods began (Neh 1:1; 2:1). When we come to the 1335th day-year of Daniel 12:12, therefore, its January-to-December year in 1843 overlapped with the 2300th day-year of Daniel 8:14 that extended from the fall of 1843 to the fall of 1844. For practical purposes, therefore, we may say that the 1335 days take us to the same year of 1844 as does the prophetic time period of Daniel 8:14.

This speech of the glorious angel in Daniel 12 supplies three time periods: the 3½ times, the 1290 days, and the 1335 days. Historically, these end respectively in 1798, 1798, and 1844. Our reference to *chronos* time appears to take into account all three of these prophecies, not just the first of them. This means that the angel's statement in Revelation 10—that "there should be time no longer" (KJV)—could not have been pronounced until the third and last of the three periods had been completed. This took place in 1844. Any time after that, this statement could have been spoken.

Daniel 8:14. There is no direct lexical connection between Revelation 10 and Daniel 8:14, but there may well be a thematic connection between them. That connection has to do with the time units in Daniel 8:14, the 2300 evening-mornings (days). What is an evening-morning? The successive use of this kind of phraseology for the days of creation in Genesis 1 indicates that a 24-hour day was intended, an expression of only chronological significance. May there be some theological significance to the use of evening-mornings in Daniel 8:14?

Daniel 8 is above all a prophecy about the sanctuary. A struggle over the sanctuary takes place between the Prince of the host and the little horn. Hebrew words for sanctuary occurs three times in this narrative (vss. 11, 13, 14). The word *tāmîḏ* (daily, continual) found in this passage (vss. 11–13) occurs 30 times elsewhere in the OT connected with the sanctuary. The two angels of 8:13 are called "holy ones," a rare term for angels in the OT; but here these "holy ones" are referred to in the setting of the "holy place" or "sanctuary." The ram and the goat used as symbols at the beginning of the chapter were also used as sacrificial animals at the sanctuary. Thus, it is evident that Daniel 8 is a thoroughgoing sanctuary prophecy.

It is in this light that the "evening-mornings" of its time element should be examined. There was a particular aspect of the sanctuary service that took place evening and morning. In the evening the priest burned incense and lighted the lamps; in the morning he trimmed the lamps and burned incense again. These activities were to be carried out "evening to morning before the Lord continually [*tāmîḏ*]" (Lev 24:3).

Through the use of His pillar of cloud and pillar of fire, God Himself marked off just the time when these activities were to be performed. One changed to the other at sunset and sunrise, thus marking the time when the priest was to carry out these activities in the tabernacle. This was the way the Lord led, guided, and watched over His people and His sanctuary evening and morning for the 40 years of their wandering in the wilderness (Num 9:15, 21).

Given this special sanctuary significance for the evening and the morning sequence, it may be suggested that the evenings and the mornings in the prophecy of Daniel 8 take on added significance. An evening-morning is not just a 24-hour period—it is a "sanctuary day."

Returning to Revelation 10, we should note again the symbolism of the dress and appearance of the mighty angel. The cloud wrapped around the angel we have discussed above. It can be related to the cloud God wrapped around Himself when He led the children of Israel in the wilderness. The feet of this mighty angel appeared like pillars of fire. The pillar of fire that is known best in the Bible is the pillar of fire which led the children of Israel in the wilderness. Thus, in terms of imagery, the mighty angel of Revelation 10 presents the two main elements that demonstrated the presence of the God of Israel over His sanctuary and over His people: the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire.

That same pillar of cloud and pillar of fire is referred to indirectly in Daniel 8, if the evening-mornings of verse 14 are indeed sanctuary days. Since the angel who appears in this manner is dealing with *prophetic time*, and since this specific element of the sanctuary day is used in one particular time prophecy, a connection between that language in Daniel 8:14 and this imagery in Revelation 10 can be suggested.

Such a potential connection with the prophecy of Daniel 8:14 should also be taken into account when one considers what the mighty angel of Revelation 10 means when he says that "there should be time no longer." As understood by Seventh-day Adventists, those evening-mornings extended—in historical fulfillment—from 457 B.C. to A.D. 1844.

Thus, this line of time prophecy also presents the date of 1844 as the juncture before which the angel could not have made his statement about time, but after which he could justifiably have done so.

Intra-Oath Relations

In the days of the seventh trumpet angel (vs. 7). The mighty angel's cry that "there should be time no longer" (KJV) is especially related to the two statements that follow immediately (the days of the seventh angel; the finishing of the mystery of God). Both statements bear upon the question of time, the first more than the second. The more direct time statement occurs in the next phrase that refers to the sounding of the seventh angel's trumpet. It is important to translate this phrase precisely in order to determine what it says about time.

Literally, the phrase translates, "but in the days of the sound/voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound the trumpet." This portion of the passage consists of a prepositional phrase followed by a dependent qualifying clause. If we had only the prepositional phrase, we might assume that the sound or voice (*phōnēs*) of the seventh angel referred to the blowing of his trumpet, just as the previous angels blew their trumpets (8:7–8, 10, 12; 9:1, 13). The qualifying phrase, "when/whenever he is about to sound the trumpet," however, indicates that this is rather a period of time leading up to the actual blowing of the trumpet.

This distinction has been noted by various commentators. Ladd, for example, first translates this phrase by transposing the qualifying clause forward into the prepositional phrase: "In the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, ..."[17] He then proceeds to note the significance of the verb *mellō* (to be about to do something) and cites its use elsewhere in Revelation (3:2; 8:13; and 10:4 in this same passage). In Revelation 10:4 it refers to John as he was *about* to write down the message of the seven thunders but was told not to do so.

Ladd also calls attention to the time unit (in the days) which fits in with the use of the verb "to be about to." "This will occur not when the seventh angel sounds, but 'in the days' of the sounding of the seventh trumpet."[18] His conclusion about the implications of these two facts from the text is, "The verse does not say, 'when the trumpet sounds,' but 'in the days of the trumpet call.' This suggests clearly that the sounding of the seventh trumpet is not to be thought of as a simple act; it embodies a period of time."[19] Barnhouse notes the same factor as operative here: "The voice of the seventh messenger is heard for some considerable time, 'in the days of the voice.' It is not a sharp piercing cry, but a long-drawn-out judgment."[20]

The picture described and alluded to in the larger passage of Revelation 10 appears to be as follows: The sixth angel has blown his trumpet (9:13). Following his sounding, the events that are to occur take place in the time frame allotted to them. When those days and events conclude, the time is turned over to the seventh angel, but he has not yet actually blown his trumpet; he is only getting ready to do so (about to). It is in this seventh-trumpet interval that the mighty angel of Revelation 10 says that there should be time no longer.

Since historical time continues, obviously the angel's reference is not to that kind of time. Some other kind of time is involved. Furthermore, in this interval there is no calibrated symbolic or prophetic time like there was under the sixth trumpet (cf. 9:15). Thus, the mighty angel appears to be declaring under oath that all prophetic time periods have ended. The events that occur when the angel does sound his trumpet (described in Revelation 11:15–18) are events of great finality. Human history comes to an end, and the direct rule of God in His kingdom is established. The saints are rewarded, and the wicked are destroyed.

The mystery of God. The final phrase of the three elements that constitute the angel's oath has to do with the completion of the mystery of God. "But that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God, as he announced to his servants the prophets, should be fulfilled" (10:7).

Since the prophecies of Daniel have been in view throughout this passage, it is natural that he should be considered one of those prophets who announced this mystery. Daniel's connection is noted by some commentators. Caird observes, "It might appear self-evident that this refers to the prophecies of the Old Testament, and in particular Daniel."[21] Ford says that this kind of language has been used in Daniel: "The Hebrew word *raz*, 'mystery,' is frequent in Daniel and the Qumran scrolls and refers primarily to the secret of the times, and the sequence of events and the consummation."[22]

A number of suggestions have been made about the precise nature of the mystery being discussed. Bousset suggests that it refers to the overthrow of Satan. While this element may well be included, it should not be limited to just that event. Another idea proposed has been that this refers to the birth of the Messiah (Vischer). This seems unlikely in view of the end-time focus of this prophecy.

A more broadly based suggestion is that the "mystery" involves everything about God's purpose in the world (Charles). The general nature of this suggestion makes it difficult to disagree with. Looking at the context in this oath, Caird has suggested that the mystery has to do with going back to the original creation.[23] Ladd has drawn upon parallels with Daniel (especially Daniel 2:29–30, referring to God as a revealer of prophetic mysteries) to suggest that another mystery of prophecy is involved here.[24] The mystery, however, appears to deal more with the actual close of the plan of salvation than it does with the announcement of further prophetic mysteries leading up to that close.

An alternative suggestion about the nature of the mystery to be finished can be made from its context in Revelation. The event immediately preceding the reference to this mystery is the sounding of the seventh trumpet. Its mention forms part of the sentence. That being the case, it is reasonable to look at the events to occur under the seventh trumpet (Rev 11:15–18) to determine what kind of mystery will be "fulfilled" at that time. The events are essentially threefold in nature.

First, the sounding of the seventh trumpet discloses the full establishment of the rule of God and His eternal kingdom (11:15–17). This has been something of a mystery up to the present time, because that kingdom is presently a spiritual one, not fully visible to the natural eye. When the seventh trumpet sounds, however, the real nature of God's eternal kingdom will become fully apparent.

Second, when the seventh angel sounds, it means that the time has come for the wicked to meet their just rewards (11:18). This, too, has been something of a mystery. For example, the identification of the wicked. In some cases this may be readily apparent; but in other cases the distinction is not yet clear to our eyes. Then, there is the matter that has puzzled men and women for ages: Why do the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer? Now the answer to the questions will be fully and finally revealed.

Third, with the sounding of the seventh angel's trumpet the righteous will receive their reward, especially their welcome into God's eternal kingdom (11:18). This has also been a mystery hidden from human eyes. But then it will become clear. Thus, the sounding of the seventh trumpet terminates and answers questions about the plan of salvation that previously have appeared to be mysteries.

Much of this kind of information seems to revolve around the rule of God's eternal kingdom. Three specific things about it will be revealed at that time: the great divine Ruler of it, the citizens who will inhabit it, and those who will be excluded from it. These particular spiritual secrets of the mystery of the plan of salvation will be revealed clearly when the seventh angel sounds his trumpet and "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ" (11:15).[25]

Summary on "Time"

The above discussion has centered upon the chronological relations of several time statements to the angel's oath ("there should be time no longer," 10:7, KJV). Three different areas have been examined to determine these relations: (1) the immediate context of the prophecy of Revelation 10, (2) the near context of the book of Revelation, and (3) parallels from Daniel. This inquiry has produced a total of seven chronological relationships for examination.

If we look at these lines of prophecy from a historicist perspective, we see that two have provided general periods of time for consideration, but five have provided specific timings to relate to this sworn statement in Revelation 10. This information can now be summarized as shown on the following page.

It may be seen from the chart that these lines of prophetic time extend no farther than 1844. No other apocalyptic prophecies of specific amounts of symbolic time are known to reach beyond that point. Consequently, it can be said correctly that in 1844 prophetic symbolic time came to an end.

That the end of historical time is not meant by the angel's oath is clear from the contents of Revelation 10 itself. The mighty angel's announcement should thus be taken as dealing with symbolic prophetic time. With the known lines of prophetic time converging to conclude at 1844, that point provides the most appropriate occasion for this announcement of the angel to be made. The mighty angel's oath is best taken then as an announcement of the end of symbolic apocalyptic time prophecies in 1844.

Chronological Relations of "No More [Prophetic] Time" (Rev 10:6)

I.	General	
	A. As an answer to the question "How long?" (Rev 6:10).	Points to coming judgment and rewards for the saints.
	B. "In the days when the seventh angel is about to sound" (Rev 10:7).	In the interval between the end of the sixth angel's trumpet and the sounding of the seventh.
II.	Specific	
	A. After the 1260 days (Rev 11:3)	Ended 1798
	B. After the day-month-year (Rev 9:15)	Ended 1844
	C. After the 1290 days (Dan 12:11)	Ended 1798
	D. After the 1335 days (Dan 12:12)	Ended 1844
	E. After the 2300 evening-mornings (Dan 8:14)	Ended 1844

The Bittersweet Book

We now turn to examine the third and final section of the narrative (vss. 8–11). This section describes the prophet's experience with the little scroll. He is instructed to take the scroll from the angel and to eat it. The symbolic meal proved sweet in his mouth but bitter in his stomach. Following this experience, he was told to prophesy again to many peoples, nations, and tongues.

The range of symbolism is considerable. We will examine its details by dividing the passage into several sections.

Description of the Angel

The description of the mighty angel is given again, but more briefly. Mounce calls this a "rhetorical device."[26] It is employed to tie together the opening and closing sections of the narrative and to emphasize the links between the angel and the open book in those two scenes.

The angel is described again as standing over land and sea, a sign of the universality of his message. This universality is complemented now in this third section by the directions given to John to prophesy a new message to "many peoples and nations and tongues and kings" (vs. 11).

The open book in the hand of the angel is noted once again. This element is central to the experience of the prophet. The first voice heard comes from heaven and is probably the voice of God Himself speaking (10:8). Mounce places emphasis upon the significance of the origin of the communication: "That the voice is a voice from heaven emphasizes the authoritative nature of the command."[27]

Time Factor

Barnes is one commentator who has stressed the time factors involved in this section. At the outset he notes, "The passage here (ver. 8) introduces a new symbol, that of 'eating the book,' and evidently refers to something that was to occur *before* [author's italics] the 'mystery should be finished'; that is, before the seventh trumpet should sound."[28]

In the conclusion to this section the prophet is instructed to prophesy again. This also involves a time factor, as Barnes notes: "The expression here must refer to something that would occur *after* [author's italics] the symbolical action of 'eating' the little book, or to some consequence of eating it...."[29] Mounce concurs, "It is *after* [author's italics] the eating of the book that John is told he must prophesy again...."[30]

The chronological significance of both activities described at the beginning and the end of this passage (eating, prophesying) is that they both occur in the interval during which the seventh angel is getting ready to sound his trumpet.

Consuming the Little Scroll

The prophet is instructed by the voice from heaven to approach the angel and to take the little scroll from his hand. In his visionary experience the prophet does so. In response the angel instructs him to take and eat the scroll. This the prophet does also.

In the vision the action now shifts to the prophet. Up to this point the prophet has been an observer. Now he becomes a participant.

Before examining the issue of the sweetness and bitterness of the scroll, we may ask the more general question, What does it mean to eat the scroll? Barnes interprets thus: "The meaning here, then, is plain. He was to possess himself of the contents of the book; to receive it into his mind; as we do food, for spiritual nourishment...."[31]

But the consumption of the little scroll is not just for internal assimilation, it is also for public proclamation. As Barnes puts it, "The meaning is, that, as a consequence of becoming possessed of the little volume and its contents, he would be called to proclaim divine truth, or to make the message of God known to mankind."[32]

Mounce also emphasizes both the assimilation and communication factors involved here: "[This] symbolizes the complete appropriation of prophetic revelation. John is to assimilate the content of the scroll before communicating it to others."[33]

The intention of the angel in giving the open scroll to the prophet has been emphasized by Barnes: " 'And he said unto me, Take it,' as if he had expected this application; or had come down to furnish him with this little volume, and had anticipated that the request would be made. There was no reluctance in giving it up."[34] Thus, the narrative conveys the impression that the mighty angel was to come from heaven at just the time he did in order to give the open scroll to the agent or agents (whom John represents) who were to be involved with it in this intimate way.

Sweet and Bitter Taste

There are several biblical passages cited in the commentaries as parallels to the prophetic experience of taste described here.[35] Proverbs 9:17–18 and Job 20:12–14 tell how sweet the evil deed is to the evil doer, but it turns to bitterness and death when its effects are felt. The sweetness of God's word is extolled in both Psalms 19:10 and 119:103. In the midst of his prophetic biography Jeremiah exclaimes, "Thy words were found, and I ate them, and thy words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart." Of course, his experience turned to bitterness when he experienced the rejection and persecution of the people in bringing that word to them (cf. vss. 17–18).

The most direct and frequently cited parallel to that which is described in Revelation 10, however, comes from Ezekiel's similar experience with a scroll (Ezek 2:8–10; 3:1–4). Ezekiel heard a voice instructing him to eat what was given him. Then he saw a hand extending a scroll to him. The scroll was spread out before him, and the prophet read words of mourning and lamentation, obviously representing the fate that was going to befall his people. Then Ezekiel was told to eat the scroll and to go and speak to the house of Israel. He ate and the scroll tasted sweet in his mouth.

This experience of Ezekiel provides the most direct biblical model for what is described in Revelation 10. However, it falls short in one particular: the resultant bitterness in the belly. Nor do the experiences of the wicked described in Job and Proverbs provide a complete parallel either. They have both elements of sweet and bitter, but these are the experiences of the wicked, not the righteous as we encounter in Revelation 10.

Even though a different group is addressed here, these experiences of the wicked can provide some sort of general parallel. The real crux between the sweet and the bitter is that the deed itself (which is sweet) does not provide the anticipated results (hence, causing bitterness). The same may be said of the prophet and the church he represents in Revelation 10. The sweetness of the message of God's word turns to bitterness when the anticipated result does not materialize.

The sweetness and bitterness have been viewed in several ways by the commentators. For example, Ford sees Ezekiel's bitterness in the fact that "he is told that Israel will not listen to him."[36] For Mounce, these figures of speech indicate that "the sweet scroll which turns the stomach bitter is a message for the church. Before the final triumph believers are going to pass through a formidable ordeal."[37]

Kiddle takes a similar view: "John, however, soon finds the scroll bitter to digest. His message is to the true Israel, the Christian church: and though it ends with the triumph of God's people, it speaks also of a formidable ordeal which must precede their vindication. The new bittersweet knowledge he must broadcast to the churches in all lands."[38]

Barnhouse comes closer to the prophetic character of Revelation 10 when he states, "knowledge of the future is sweet, but what it holds is bitter."[39]

Some evaluation of these points of view should be given here. While it is true that John's experience is a message for the *church* of the Christian Era, it does not seem justified to limit this message to just the church itself. At the end of the episode the prophet is told to prophesy *again* to many *peoples*, *nations*, *tongues*, and *kings*. It seems unlikely that these elements are all Christian prior to the time he is to prophesy to them. In like manner, the earlier prophesying by the church (alluded to by the word "again," vs. 11) should also take in a similar broad audience in its missionary thrust.

Part of the prophet's bitterness of stomach may have come through the inattentiveness of his audience, but it does not seem wise to limit this figure of speech to that alone. And there is nothing in this narrative itself to identify the bitterness with persecution. The persecution described by Revelation 12:17; 13:13–17 appears to be the final persecution that should take up after the prophet has prophesied again to the nations.

The sweetness of this passage is not difficult to understand, but the bitterness is more difficult to interpret. Parallels from the beginning of the chapter may offer some assistance.

At the beginning of the chapter, after the mighty angel spoke for the first time, seven thunders sounded; but their message was sealed up (vss. 3–4). It was suggested that these seven thunders may have represented seven final judgments before the end, and that their place may have been taken by the seven last plagues.

At the end of the chapter the mighty angel is described again, followed now by the experience of the prophet with the scroll. The experience is one of bitterness and disappointment.

Both elements in the narrative appear to be describing similar situations, but from different points of view. If the message linked to the angel descending with the little scroll (at the beginning of the chapter) was one of final judgment that did not come, then the disappointment or bitterness that John (representing the church) experienced (at the end of the chapter) may well have come about through the non-fulfillment of that message of final judgment.

The bitterness presented by the prophecy seems to derive from an internal experience, from disappointment with an anticipated result, rather than from external factors such as the nonacceptance of the message by the audience, or persecution of the ones giving the message.

New Mission

The plural verb *legousin* (they say, are saying [to me]) at the beginning of verse 11 has occasioned some comment. We would ordinarily have expected a singular verb here (he says [to me]). Following Charles, Ford suggests that the function of this plural is to supply an indefinite subject.[40] Mounce suggests that it may function with a passive meaning here.[41] However, the voice of the mighty angel and the voice from heaven could be speaking in concert here. Or, the angels with the trumpets could be speaking. Another possibility would be the elders and the living creatures around the throne in heaven. This matter cannot be settled with finality; however, it does not bear directly upon the meaning of the content of the message to the prophet.

The prophet should be taken here, and previously, as symbolizing the human beings who would make up the movement giving this final message. John lived at the beginning of the Christian Era when he received this vision. But the prophetic scene itself looks down toward the end of time, long after John's death. He should, therefore, be taken as representative of those who will bear this final message, the part he was acting out under those circumstances. It would have been physically impossible for John to have borne his message to all of the groups he was told to address (vs. 11). We may look, therefore, for a group or movement to fulfill this commission in the end-time.

The connection of this prophecy with the end-time is emphasized by its connections with the other end-time prophecies in Revelation through the language it uses for the groups to be addressed (peoples, nations, tongues, kings [vs. 11]). Charles has noted, "It is interesting that this enumeration, which occurs seven times in the Apocalypse … is here given a different form, and *basileusin* (kings) is put in the place of *phulais* (tribes). The kings are especially those mentioned in 17:10, 12 The Seer is recasting this characteristic phrase with a view to the contents of his later visions."[42]

The extent to which this message is to be given is also emphasized by the term *pollois* (many). As Ford notes, "*Pollois*, 'many,' refers to the vastness of the mission field, applying not to one empire alone, but to a multitude of races and kingdoms and crowned heads."[43]

We should also comment briefly on the use of the verb "to prophesy." Some commentators soften the force of this verb, construing it to mean a mere speaking for God. However, this narrative, as a whole, has been dealing with a prophetic message. Consequently, the presentation of a thoroughly prophetic message to the world again would fit best with the meaning of this verb here.

The mighty angel's oath/message is based upon or related to the open scroll in his hand. Since that scroll may be identified as the prophetic book of Daniel, a further reason is given here for seeing this final message as truly prophetic in character.

Mounce has placed some stress upon the prophetic nature of this final message: "It is the final act in the great drama of God's creative and redemptive activity. The meaning of history comes into sharp focus at the end point in time.… His prophecy is the culmination of all previous prophecies in that it leads on to the final destruction of evil and the inauguration of the eternal state."[44]

Historical Fulfillment

Time and space prevent a thorough review of the history of the interpretation of this chapter or a complete recording of the historical details of the application made here. Some brief comments should be made, however, on the basis of the exegetical insights obtained from our examination of the chapter.

The central thrust of the narrative is that a special message is to be brought to the world in the end-time. This truth is represented symbolically by a mighty angel coming down from heaven to earth (vs. 1). The message is to be worldwide in extent. This fact is represented symbolically at the beginning of the chapter (vs. 2), and it is stated literally at its end (vs. 11).

The special message for this time is related to the open scroll in the hand of the angel. From the various parallels between this chapter and Daniel 12 we may conclude that the scroll—now opened—is the same scroll that the prophet Daniel was told to seal up, his own book of prophecies. Thus, in the end-time a special message is to be given to the world, and that message is related directly to the prophecies of the book of Daniel, to be opened, studied, and proclaimed.

The angel's communication is seen to involve a message of judgment. This is represented by the seven thunders. Since elsewhere in Revelation thunders from the throne of God accompany judgments, these thunders too may be taken as representing judgments. Their message was, however, to be sealed up or temporarily withdrawn. Their place appears to be taken by the seven last plagues of Revelation 16, the next sequence of seven in the book, and a sequence which is connected with final judgments. The presentation and immediate sealing up of the seven thunders appear to be a preliminary announcement of judgment that is withdrawn or deferred to a later time, according to this symbolism.

The second major point made in the message of the mighty angel deals with prophetic time. He announces with a solemn oath that "there should be time no longer." From the context of this oath it is clear that historical time is not being alluded to, because historical time continues through another series of prophetic events. The time must, therefore, be prophetic or symbolic apocalyptic time. It is this kind of time that is found especially in the apocalyptic time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. They were to come to an end with the oath of this angel.

Our study of the time prophecies, especially those that can be linked to Revelation 10 directly or indirectly, leads to the identification of the year 1844 as the termination point for several of these prophetic time lines. No time prophecies in Daniel and Revelation extend beyond that point. This chronological juncture provides the appropriate location for the announcement of the mighty angel to be made about the cessation of prophetic time.

This important chronological juncture in the middle of the narrative forms a pivot around which the events prophesied in the other parts of the narrative cluster. This applies to the postponed judgment announced at the beginning of the chapter; it applies to the experience of the bitter disappointment following the middle of the chapter; and it applies to the new prophecy to be given at the end of the chapter.

In the passage dealing with the prophet's sweet and bitter experience, John (representing end-time Christians) first tastes the sweetness of the message derived from the scroll of Daniel when it was studied, absorbed, and proclaimed. But after the initial sweetness, tasted by those experiencing the joy and hope they found in those prophecies, their experience turned to bitterness when the anticipated fulfillment was not realized.

The central chronological juncture of this chapter also presents a time frame in which to look for the historical occurrence of this experience. During the course of Christian church history in the nineteenth century, there developed a great expectancy that the second coming of Christ and the end of the world was at hand. In North America this was embodied especially in the Millerite movement, proclaiming the advent of Christ through the 1830s and 1840s, until the bitter disappointment of October, 1844.

The Millerites based their convictions upon a careful study of the prophecies of the now-opened book of Daniel. On that basis the Millerites correctly determined that prophetic time would come to an end in 1844, as sworn in the oath of the mighty angel. Sweet as this message was to them, however, they incorrectly identified the event that would occur at the end of those prophetic time periods. As a result, they suffered a bitter disappointment when the sweet hope of their Saviour's return failed to materialize. The bitterness of this experience was so great that contemporary adherents of the movement and their later spiritual heirs have referred to this turn of events as the Great Disappointment.

But the members of this movement (represented symbolically by the prophet) were not to remain in this crestfallen condition. On the contrary, they are to take up the challenge of a new call to prophesy to the world again. Jesus will still return and the plan of salvation will still be completed.

They live and prophesy now, throughout the world after the end of all time prophecies, as the angel had said. They are to give this new message in a time when the seventh angel is coming closer and closer to sounding the final trumpet sound. When he finally does blow his trumpet, their task will have reached its fulfillment. There will be no bitter taste of disappointment this time. This is indeed the task that the spiritual heirs of the Millerite movement see being fulfilled in the work and message of their worldwide movement.

Conclusions

Revelation 10 divides over the watershed statement about the end of prophetic time. The statement locates the portrayal of the scenes of the vision into the framework of the history of the church in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The various aspects of the prophecy can be outlined in their successive order around the focal point of the angel's oath about prophetic time in the following summary fashion:

1. A new message is to be given to the world—represented by the descent of the mighty angel who stands on land and sea with an open book in his hand.
2. The message given is one of judgment, but that judgment will be delayed—represented by the seven thunders and the sealing up of their message.
3. A solemn oath is sworn, that there should be no more (prophetic) time—fulfilled by the lines of time prophecies which converge upon 1844.
4. An experience of disappointment would occur at this time—represented by the bitter taste of the scroll when the end of the world did not occur.
5. A prophetic message is to be proclaimed to all of the world again:

> The end of prophetic time is now understood.
> This preaching takes place in the "time of the end."
> The end of all things is at hand.
> The seventh angel will soon sound his trumpet,
> And then the kingdoms of this world will become the
> kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ!
>
> Author's trans.

Chapter XIV

Time Prophecies of Daniel 12 and Revelation 12–13

William H. Shea

Editorial Synopsis. As the reader would suspect, the preterist/historical-critical school locates these time periods in the past (second century B.C. for Daniel; first century A.D. for Revelation). The futurist school projects the same to the end of the age. Both regard the periods as expressions of literal time. The historicist school on the other hand accepts these time periods as symbolic of longer spans of years according to the year-day principle and locates them in the flow of human history at the point indicated by the prophecy. Seventh-day Adventists identify with this latter method of prophetic interpretation, the hermeneutic of the Protestant Reformation.

In recent years some historicists have begun to argue that Daniel 12:5–13 with its three time periods (3½ times; 1290 days; 1335 days) is a free-standing prophecy (or, at least subject to a dual fulfillment) focused on the end-time. Support for this is alleged to be found in the time period of Revelation 13:1–10, in which the 42 months of the leopardlike beast is mentioned subsequent (vs. 5) to the reference regarding its wounding (vs. 3). From this it is inferred that the beast will have another persecuting reign in the future, a reign of 42 months or 1260 literal days. Consequently, like classical futurism, the time periods of Daniel 12 and Revelation 13 are construed to be periods of literal time that should be located in the last few years of human history.

These futurist proposals rest essentially on a misunderstanding of the thought patterns of Hebrew prophecy. They represent a reading of the Hebrew idiom through Western eyeglasses. The result is that the conclusions drawn are untrue to the intent of the respective prophecies.

It is not the purpose of the writer to give an exposition of these particular chapters with historical application. Rather, he proposes to discover in each prophecy the biblical indicators that point to where these time periods were intended to be located by the inspired prophet. The evidence is clear in each case.

The biblical data indicates that Daniel 12:5–13 is not a free-standing prophecy. Its three time periods form the conclusion of Daniel's fourth vision with 10:5–21 serving as introduction and 11:1–12:4 as the body of the vision proper. Furthermore, its 3½ times and 1290 days are tied linguistically and subjectwise to the body of the vision (Dan 11:31–35). Being bound to the 1290 day passage, the 1335 day period likewise has its starting point in the same verses in the body of the vision.

This means that the three time periods of Daniel 12 cannot be projected to an end-of-the-age fulfillment. They are locked into the flow of human history where Daniel 11:31–35 has placed them—that is, in the past, and to the period of the medieval papacy and its rule. The literary arrangement of Revelation 12, with its double reference to the 1260 year period, affirms the same location for this often-mentioned era.

The organizing principle of the Revelation 13:1–10 vision is parallelism of thought. This is a common idiom in Hebrew poetry that also spills over into Hebrew prose and prophecy. Verses 1–4 are the descriptive aspects of the vision that describe in terse phrases the rise and career of the beast, its wounding, and intimates its future revival. Verses 5–10 presents the second member of the thought parallel. It is the explanatory section and explains the activities of the beast before its wounding. The period of these specified activities (42 months or 1260 years) is part of the explanation. It informs the reader of the time period during which the beast would carry out its persecuting and blasphemous rule until its near-fatal wounding. It then follows with more information on its revival. The biblical indicators are clear that 13:1–10 is one unit and speaks about the same period of time as given in Daniel 12 and Revelation 12.

There is no evidence in the biblical data to suggest that these time periods are to have a dual fulfillment—one in the past and one in the closing days of human history. Such a view of the apocalyptic visions of Daniel and Revelation is without scriptural support.

Chapter Outline

I. Introduction
II. Daniel 12
III. Revelation 12
IV. Revelation 13
V. Conclusion

Introduction

Two dozen time prophecies found in the Bible are identified as belonging to the classical prophets. Expositors agree that these should be interpreted as literal time. About two dozen more are found in the specialized prophetic books classified as apocalyptic: Daniel and Revelation. There are more differences of opinion about interpreting these time elements. Historicist interpreters, including Seventh-day Adventists, hold that these time expressions are symbolic and stand for longer periods of actual historical time. Other interpreters from both the preterist and futurist schools believe they should be taken simply as literal time.

Elsewhere I have discussed the nature of the apocalyptic time periods and the year-for-a-day principle.[1] In this chapter I propose to make a contextual and content study of a few apocalyptic time periods to discover those features that will indicate when they should find fulfillment. This is not a historical study in depth. It is rather a textual study to see what the text itself says about the application of these prophecies in its own terms. Obviously, the text should have something to say about which school of interpretation lines up most closely with its data.

Same Time Period

One reason for selecting these three passages (Dan 12; Rev 12–13) is that they have a number of elements in common. All three passages describe the identical time period. In Daniel 12:7 it is given (in Hebrew) as 3½ times. The same phraseology of 3½times appears in Revelation 12:14 (in Greek). This in turn is paired with the 1260 days of verse 6. Finally, Revelation 13:5 repeats this same time period again, in this instance as 42 months. Thus, a common numerical thread runs through these three texts in that the 3½ times equals 42 months and the 42 months equals 1260 days.

Same Events

These passages not only refer to the same time period, but they also describe the same events that occurred during that period. Daniel 12:7 identifies this as a period for the "shattering" of the power of the holy people. Revelation 12:6 and 14 identify it as a time when the woman, who represents the church, is forced to flee from her persecutor, the dragon-beast motivated by the devil, and to hide in the wilderness. The final passage, in Revelation 13:5, identifies this period as a time when the beast power exercises its authority against the saints.

Thus, we have a common time period in these passages (1260 days and equivalents) and a common event: persecution of the saints. There are, of course, other elements in these passages. The features mentioned above along with these have been matters of disputed interpretation. Therefore a new examination of the passages from the standpoint of their context and contents may be helpful in eliciting a better understanding toward their interpretation.

Daniel 12

Three Time Periods

There are actually three time periods in this part of the prophecy of Daniel. Verse 7 mentions the 3½times for the shattering of the power of the holy people. Verse 11 mentions a period of 1290 days in connection with the taking away of the "daily" or "continual" and the setting up of the abomination of desolation. And verse 12 mentions a period of 1335 days until a certain blessing will be bestowed. All three time prophecies need to be studied here together.

Commentators have taken note of these time periods, and their explanations reflect the different schools of prophetic interpretation. The preterist school regards these periods as literal time, referring to events in the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes (second century B.C.). Futurist interpreters construe these same time periods to be related to the end of the age, still future to our own time now as this is being written. They also see them as units of literal time. Historicist interpreters on the other hand understand these time units as symbols and, thus, standing for longer periods of actual historical time.

Preterist approaches. To illustrate the preterist approach first, the standard commentary of J. A. Montgomery in the *International Critical Commentary* series may be cited. Montgomery credits the great form critic Herman Gunkel for the view which he adopts in his commentary:

> Gunkel's suggestion ..., accepted by [other commentators], is here followed, that the two vv. [12:11, 12] are successive glosses intended to prolong the term of 1,150 days announced at 8:14; that term was not fulfilled and these glosses, which must be very early, successively extend the time to 1,290 and 1,335 days. For the difficulties in the way of assimilation of the three contradictory figures one need only glance at the labors of the comm. at this point.[2]

Several problems with this interpretation may be noted at the outset. Montgomery divides the 2,300 days of Daniel 8:14 according to an evening and a morning sacrifice; but this separation and division is not justifiable.[3] The figures are not contradictory because they do not deal with the same things: Verse 7 speaks about the persecution of the saints; verse 11 talks about the abomination of desolation; and verse 12 emphasizes a positive feature, a blessing. Montgomery himself notes the difficulties involved with working with these figures in this way.

A more recent statement of this common view is presented in the commentary on Daniel by E. Heaton:

> Many scholars take the view that these two verses are successive glosses added when the New Age still tarried after the expiry of the 1,150 days of 8.14. The new dating of v. 11–1,290 days—is the longest value which can be given to the three and half years found in v. 7 and 7:25. The further extension of the period to 1335 days in v. 12 leaves everybody guessing.[4]

Thus, the standard interpretation of these three time periods in Daniel 12 according to the preterist school is that the pseudepigraphic author (or a later redactor) added these three time periods in succession in an appendix to the scroll when the expected events did not take place. He had to keep lengthening the supposed 1150 days when one after another of his predictions did not come to pass (1150 ® 1260 ® 1290 ® 1335). This interpretation obviously entails a very different view from that of Scripture on the nature of revelation and inspiration. This is not true divine foreknowledge revealed to the prophet. Rather, as a human being, the "prophet" simply guesses wrong. There is no divine aid.

There are, of course, other views of these time periods even within the preterist school. A. Lacocque, for example, takes these dates as the occasions upon which successive editions of the book were made up and distributed.

> Therefore 1,290 days = three and half years plus one month. It may be that this extra month represents the period of composition of the great vision in Dan. 10–12;
> (d) '1,335 days' in Dan 12:12 adding another month and half to the preceding figure. We may see here the delay before the final publication of the Book of Daniel in its entirety (= two and a half months after the purification of the Temple on 12 December, 164, or February 163).[5]

Not all commentators within the preterist school consider the idea of successive glosses extending the time satisfactory. Hartman and Di Lella criticize this view because the figures do not fit the historical periods that are known:

> The trouble with this theory is that according to I Maccabees, the Temple was defiled on 6 December 167 B.C. (1 Macc 1:54), a period of three years and eight days in the Julian calendar, or a sum of 1,103 days—(365 × 3) + 8—somewhat less than the 1,150 days predicted in 8:14, and the three and a half years or 1,260 days.... In view of these circumstances, it seems best to admit that what the glossators had in mind as happening at the end of the 1,290 days in 12:11 and 1,335 days in 12:12 simply cannot be ascertained with any confidence. Only guesses are possible.[6]

Futurist approaches. Turning from the confusion of the preterist commentators, we note that futurist interpreters have an easier time. Since they put these events in the future (none have occurred yet), the interpreter has no historical data with which to test or falsify this theory. Nevertheless, there are disagreements among the scholars of this school as to how these time periods should be applied and what they mean.

J. Walvoord sees these additional time periods as referring to a little lag time between the Second Coming of Christ and the setting up of His millennial kingdom:

> Although Daniel does not explain these varying durations, it is obvious that the second coming of Christ and the establishment of His millennial kingdom requires time. The 1,260 day period or precisely forty-two months of thirty days each, can be regarded as culminating with the second advent itself. This is followed by several divine judgments such as the judgment of the nations (Mt 25:31–46), and the regathering and judgment of Israel (Eze 20:34–38). These great judgments beginning with the living on earth and purging out of unbelievers who have worshipped the beast, although handled quickly, will require time. By the 1,335 days, or seventy-five days after the second advent, these great judgments will have been accomplished and the millennial kingdom formally launched. Those who attain to this period are obviously those who have been judged worthy to enter the kingdom. Hence they are called "blessed."[7]

Leon Wood follows the same approach in his futurist oriented commentary on Daniel, but he is a bit more specific about it.

> A clue as to how they (the extra 30 days of the 1290) fit this week (of Tribulation) is found in Matthew 25:31–46, which describes a time of judgment by Christ immediately after He comes in power to close this period. The purpose of the judgment is to determine those who will be permitted to enter into and enjoy the blessedness of the millennial period.[8]

On the 1,335 days Wood observes,

> The thought is thus suggested that it will be the actual starting point of the Millennium. Those who will have passed the judgment of Christ, during the preceding thirty days, would be those who would attain to it, after these forty-five additional days. What will be the need of these forty-five days? It may be the time necessary for setting up the governmental machinery for carrying on the rule of Christ. The true and full border of Israel ... will have to be established, and appointments made of those abiding in the government. A period of forty-five days would again seem to be reasonable in which to accomplish these matters.[9]

Having these 30 and 45 day periods extend *beyond* the second coming of Christ and intruding into or up to the millennium seems like an awkward situation. It creates a kind of vacuum between Christ's coming and the beginning of the millennium, when the two events should actually be simultaneous.

Historicist approach. Historicist interpreters have treated the time periods in these verses as symbolic and have applied the year-for-a-day principle to them. This provides longer periods of actual historical time: 1260, 1290, and 1335 years. For an example of how these time periods have been interpreted by one commentator, the work of U. Smith may be cited.

Smith identifies the first period by stating, "the 1260 years mark the period of papal supremacy."[10] Elsewhere, in his comment on Daniel 7:25, Smith explains this period as extending from A.D. 538 to A.D. 1798. "From this point [538, the effective date of Justinian's decree] did the papacy hold supremacy for twelve hundred and sixty years?—Exactly. For 538 + 1260 = 1798; and in the year 1798 Berthier, with a French army, entered Rome, proclaimed a republic, took the pope prisoner, and inflicted a deadly wound upon the papacy."[11]

Going on to the 1290 days Smith notes, "The two periods, therefore, the 1290 and the 1260 days, terminate together in 1798, the latter beginning in 538, and the former in 508, thirty years previous."[12] The pro-papal victory of Clovis of the Franks over the Arian Visigoth are then cited as the significant event in 508.[13]

Taking up the 1335 days of Daniel 12:12, Smith next calculates, "From this point they would extend to 1843, for 1335 added to 508 make 1843."[14] Smith cites the Millerite revival of that time as the blessed event that was to occur then:

> About the year 1843, there was a grand culmination of all the light that had been shed on prophetic subjects up to that time. The proclamation went forth in power. The new and stirring doctrine of the setting up of the kingdom of God shook the world. New life was imparted to the true disciples of Christ. The unbelieving were condemned, the churches were tested, and a spirit of revival was awakened which has had no parallel since.[15]

Contextual Relationships

Having canvassed these three points of view for their interpretations of the time periods in Daniel 12, we may now address the contextual issue. This is especially germane to the preterist point of view, for preterist scholars treat this section (12:5–12) with the dates as an appendix, glosses added after the main body of the prophecy was written. Is this really the nature of Daniel 12:5–12?

Literary arrangement of the fourth vision. First, the overall structure of the entire vision should be noted. This segment of the book covers Daniel 10–12. These three chapters comprise one entire prophecy. Basically, chapter 10 is the introduction; chapter 11:1–12:4 is the body, the didactic portion of Gabriel's prophecy; and 12:5–13 is its conclusion.

Is the conclusion (12:5–13) simply an appendix, something in the nature of an afterthought or an adjustment? Or is it an integral part of the prophecy as a whole? The former view is the preterist proposal; the later is the position advocated here.

Location of time periods. One way to approach the time period passages in chapter 12 is to note the position of their parallels in the other prophecies of the book. For example, Daniel 7 describes its vision in verses 1 to 14. The time period (for the activities of the little horn in the vision) is then given in verse 25. The same sort of phenomenon occurs in Daniel 8. The vision covers verses 1–12. At the end of verse 12 the vision cuts off and there begins an audition. The prophet listens while two angels converse about what has been shown to Daniel. It is in this audition that the dateline about the 2300 days is given.

In other words, the standard method in Daniel for presenting time periods is first to present the vision or prophecy proper; then the time period is given. But the time element is understood to relate directly to the prior description of the vision. The same model can be applied to the fourth vision recorded in Daniel 10–12. In this case the time periods stated in chapter 12 (the conclusion of the vision) relate directly to the historical events described in chapter 11 (the body of the vision). This we will demonstrate linguistically later, but here we summarize in chart form the relationship (in terms of location) between the vision proper and its accompanying time period(s):

Chart 1

	Daniel 7	Daniel 8	Daniel 10–12
Vision proper	vss. 1–14	vss. 1–12	11:1–12:4
Time elements	vs. 25	vss. 13–14	12:5–13

The exception to this rule is the prophecy found in Daniel 9:24–27. There probably is a reason for this exception. The nature of that prophecy is different. Daniel 7, 8, and 11 are what we may call outline prophecies, prophecies that outline the rise and fall of nations and their rulers. Daniel 2 is also of this nature, but it does not contain any specific time periods. Daniel 9:24–27, however, is a more local and limited prophecy.

Gabriel tells Daniel that this is a prophecy for "your people and your holy city." It is not an outline prophecy, but one that zeroes in on the Jews and their capital of Jerusalem in Judah. The time period is given at the beginning and distributed through the prophecy. This is also another way of demonstrating that the prophecy of Daniel 9 is linked to the preceding one. The prior prophecy (Dan 8) ended with a time period, and this one begins with one, thus showing that the linked subject of time is being taken up again.

Leaving the unique situation of Daniel 9 aside, we may say that the distribution of the time periods in Daniel 12 fits the same pattern in relationship to Daniel 11, that we find in the case of the prophecies and their time elements in Daniel 7 and 8. There are no literary structural grounds for leaving Daniel 12 apart from the main body of the prophecy as an appendix or series of glosses. Taken in connection with the other criticisms of the preterist point of view mentioned above, this aspect of the preterist theory rests upon a very weak basis indeed.

Verbal links. We turn now to the question of specific and direct linguistic links in the conclusion of the vision (12:5–13) with the body of the vision (11:1–12:4). If the literary structural evidence weakens the preterist interpretation, it can be said that the linguistic links weaken the futurist interpretation. These links leave no room for the time periods of Daniel 12 to be applied after the standing up of Michael (12:1). On the contrary, these periods must be applied before that point in the prophecy. Thus, they cannot be located in the interval between the second coming of Christ and the beginning of the millennium. We will treat these time periods in order.

1. ***Daniel 12:7.*** The first one, consisting of 3½ times, occurs in Daniel 12:7. This passage is inextricably intertwined with a specific passage and juncture in the prophecy of Daniel 11 according to the verbs and nouns used to express these ideas. The links formed in this way are too tight to be broken. From this one can conclude that Daniel 12 cannot be severed from Daniel 11. See charts 2 and 2a.

It should be recalled that Daniel 12:7 is an answer given to a question. The question obviously had to do with the prophecy Daniel had just received (11:1–12:4). Daniel had asked, "How long will it be to the end of these wonders?" (Dan 12:6, RSV). In answer to this the angel responded under oath, "it would be for a time, two times, and half a time; and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end, all these things would be accomplished" (vs. 7).

Unless this question and answer are completely unrelated to what Gabriel had been previously telling the prophet, there should be some evidence in the body of the prophecy as to when this shattering of the power of the holy people occurred. Indeed there is. There is precisely one place where the persecution of the saints is described in the body of the prophecy and that is in Daniel 11:32–35. According to the nature of the contents of the passage, unique in all of Daniel 11, this is where the time period of Daniel 12:7 should be applied. The linguistic links between Daniel 11:32–35 (body) and Daniel 12:7–10 (conclusion) demonstrating the directness of their connection, may be outlined as follows:

Chart 2

The Great Persecution*

Daniel 11:32–35, NIV	Daniel 12:7–10, NIV
1. "Those who have violated [*maršî'ê*] the covenant" (vs. 32).	
2. "Those who are wise [*ûmaśkîlê*] will instruct many [*yāḇînû*]" (vs. 33).	
3. "Some of the wise [*hammaś-kîlîm*] will stumble so that they may be refined [*liṣrôp*],"	
4. "purified [*ûleḇārēr*]"	4. "Many will be purified [*yiṯbārarû*],"
5. "and made spotless [*welalbēn*]"	5. "made spotless [*weyiṯlabbenû*]"
	3. "and refined [*weyiṣṣārepû*]" (vs. 10)
6. "until the time of the end" (vs. 35).	1. "but the wicked [*rešā'îm*] will continue to be wicked [*wehiršî'û*]
	2a. "None of the wicked [*rešā'îm*] will understand [*welō' yāḇînû*],"
	2b. "but those who are wise [*wehammaśkîlîm*] will understand [*yāḇînû*]" (vs. 10).

Six verbal parallels are documented here. In Daniel 11:32–35 five of these terms are used once and one of them is used twice. In Daniel 12:7–10 four of these terms are used once and one is used twice and another is used three times. There can be no doubt on the basis of these strong linguistic links that these two passages are talking about the same thing. Thus, the time period of Daniel 12:7 should be applied to date the length of the persecution described in Daniel 11:32–35.

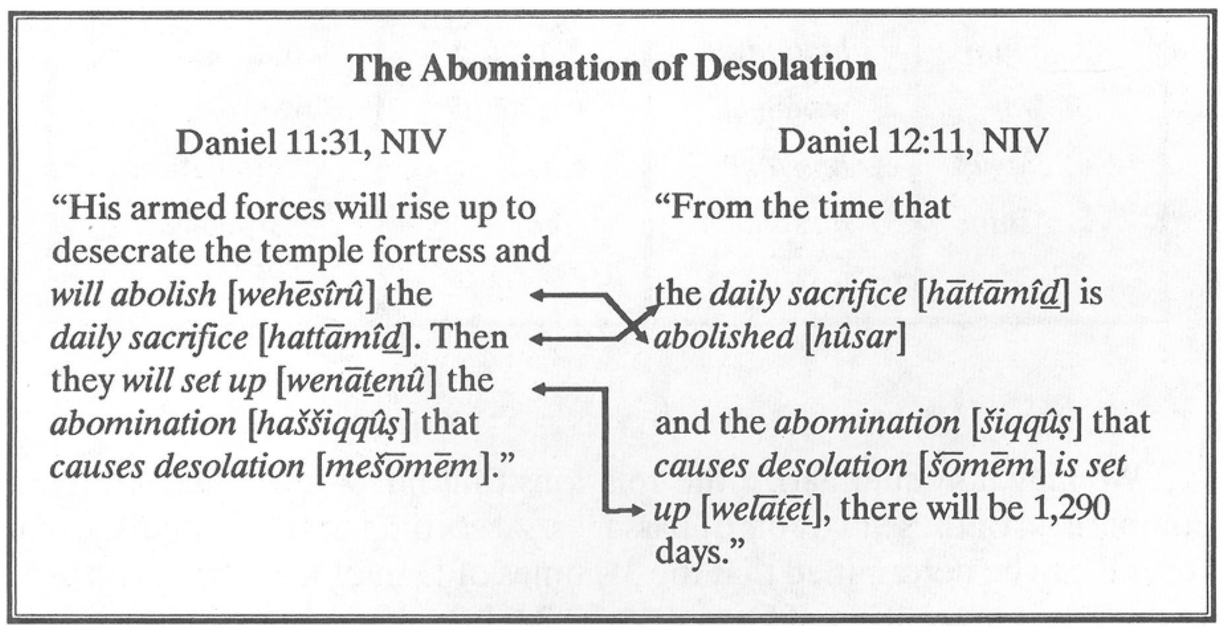
This is the place in the body of the prophecy where this prophetic time period belongs. It does not belong to an era after the end of the prophecy. Rather, it belongs to the heart of the body of the prophecy, right in its mainstream through time and events. Chart 2a summarizes these same links and may be helpful for the reader unfamiliar with Hebrew. Note that while the forms may vary in the two passages, these six verbal parallels are from the same roots.

Chart 2a

Summary of Six Hebrew Parallels for Daniel 11:32–35 and 12:7–10			
Root	Forms Daniel 11:32–35	Forms Daniel 12:7–10	Translation (root idea)
1. **rš'*	*maršî'ê*	*rešā'îm* *wehiršî'û* *rešā'îm*	"act wickedly"
2. **śkl*	*ûmaśkîlê* *hammaśkîlîm*	*wehammaśkîlîm*	"have insight"
3. **byn*	*yāḇînû*	*yāḇînû* *welō' yāḇînû*	"understand"
4. **ṣrp*	*liṣrôp*	*weyiṣṣārepû*	"refine"
5. **brr*	*ulebārēr*	*yiṯbārārû*	"cleanse"
6. **lbn*	*welalbēn*	*weyiṯlabbenû*	"make white"

2. ***Daniel 12:11.*** Progressing next to Daniel 12:11, we observe that there can be no doubt where this time period belongs. It is connected directly with Daniel 11:31. The more important phrases from these two passages can be cited side by side, and the most important verbal links in Hebrew can be shown in transliteration. See chart 3:

Chart 3



The same sort of tabulation that we made for Daniel 12:7–10 in conjunction with Daniel 11:32–35 can now be assembled for Daniel 12:11 and Daniel 11:31. There are five direct verbal parallels in Hebrew between these two passages. The main difference between these two passages is that Daniel 11:31 is written in the active voice and 12:11 is written in the passive. The former tells who would do the things mentioned, while the latter emphasized what was to be done. The linguistic links, nevertheless, are so strong that there can be no doubt that the two passages are talking precisely about the same thing. This means that the 1290 days supplied by Daniel 12:11 should be applied to Daniel 11 at that point in which the events described in verse 31 occur. This time period is definitely connected with the 11:31 events. It cannot be placed later in the sequence of the prophecy or at some future time beyond the end of the prophecy. These relations are tabulated in chart 3a to show the same five roots that appear in both passages.

Chart 3a

Summary of Hebrew Parallels for Daniel 11:31 and 12:11			
Root	Forms Daniel 11:31	Forms Daniel 12:11	Translation (root idea)
1. **swr*	*wehēsîrû*	*hûsar*	"turn aside"
2. *tāmîḏ*	*hattāmîḏ*	*hattāmîḏ*	"continual"
3. **ntn*	*wenāṯenû*	*welāṯēṯ*	"give"
4. *šiqqûṣ*	*haššiqqûṣ*	*šiqqûṣ*	"abomination"
5. **šmm*	*mešōmēm*	*šōmēm*	"be appalled, desolated"

We may now summarize the relations that have developed from our comparison of these two sets of passages. According to their linguistic features it can be determined that the 3½ times of Daniel 12:7 should be used to date the persecution of Daniel 11:32–34. It is also evident that the 1290 days from Daniel 12:11 should be used to date the taking away of the daily or continual and the setting up of the abomination of desolation in Daniel 11:31. These are the locations in the flow of events in Daniel 11 where these time periods should be located. The time periods do not belong later in the prophecy nor do they belong after its end, as an afterthought. They are intimately tied and linked to the preceding prophecy at these points.

3. ***Daniel 11:40.*** Of special importance in this connection is the reference to the "time of the end" in Daniel 11:40. In the book of Daniel the time of the end is not the end of time, as if it were a point in time when all things come to their conclusion. On the contrary, the time of the end in the book of Daniel is a period of time (cf. 8:17; 11:35; 12:4). Events occur in that period of time, and some of those events are described in Daniel 11:40–45.

Now the question arises, What is the relationship of the time periods in Daniel 12 to "the time of the end" prophesied at the close of Daniel 11. The answer has already been given above. *They occur before it*. They are not time periods which belong in the time of the end. They do not measure off events which occur in the time of the end. They occur before that era. We know this because the 1290 days of Daniel 11:31 and the 1260 days of Daniel 11:32–35 occur in this prophecy *before* the time of the end appears in Daniel 11:40. This makes it impossible to connect the 1260 and 1290 time periods with anything that has to do with the second coming of Christ and the beginning of the millennium, as has been advocated by futurist or dispensationalist interpreters.

This study is not a treatment of historical applications in detail. It is rather a contextual and content study of the relations of these time periods in the text of Daniel 11 and 12. When that text is studied carefully it can be seen that the preterist interpretation does not fit well. The historical applications proposed for these time periods do not fit our knowledge of their length of time from historical sources. Daniel 12 is not a misguided appendix with an ever-lengthening series of failed prophecies. Nor do these events fit well with events following the second coming of Christ and preceding the millennium as futurist interpreters have held. From the point in the prophecy at which they begin according to their linguistic connections they should precede, not follow, the time of the end. From intra textual relations, therefore, the 1260 and 1290 days of Daniel 12 do not belong to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes back in the second century B.C., as the preterists hold; nor do they belong to the end of time, as the futurists hold; but they are best connected with the heart of the flow of history as found in Daniel 11:31 and 11:32–35 as the historicist view upholds. Detailed historical applications of this must be reserved for another occasion and the historicist commentaries that have already treated these time periods.

4. ***Daniel 12:12.*** The angel says nothing about the 1335 day period other than to pronounce a blessing on the one who "waits and comes" to the end of that period. It is not explained why such should be blessed. Linguistic parallels such as link the 3½ times and the 1290 days to definite locations in Daniel 11 are unavailable. On the other hand no one argues that the 1335 day period should be separated from the 1290 day period. All schools of interpretation agree at least on this much: The three time periods of Daniel 12 must be studied together.

The obvious sense of verses 11–12 binds the 1290 and 1335 day periods together in a special relationship. Since it can be demonstrated on linguistic grounds that the 1290 day period is locked into the time location for the events of Daniel 11:31, we can conclude that the 1335 day period begins at the same time with the same events. The historicist view expressed by U. Smith that these periods begin in A.D. 508 and end in 1798 and 1843 respectively fits well here with the biblical data.[16]

As for the "blessing" at the end of the 1335 days in Daniel 12:12, we may look for apocalyptic connections in another quarter. It is of interest to note that a blessing is pronounced in the book of Revelation for a certain end-time group. I refer to the blessing pronounced upon those who die in the Lord in connection with the three angels' messages. The messages themselves are found in Revelation 14:6–12 and the attending blessing is found in verse 13. The second coming of Jesus is described next in verse 14.

Here then is a blessing that comes close to but precedes the coming of Jesus. It is pronounced in relation to the judgment that is heralded in Revelation 14:6. That judgment should be identified by the prophecies about the judgment in the heavenly court in Daniel 7–8. The judgment is described in chapter 7 and its time (1844) is announced in chapter 8. It would be natural and logical for this blessing found at the end of Daniel to find a connection with that judgment, the conclusion of which is also described earlier in Daniel 12:1–4.

From these potential connections it may be suggested that the blessing pronounced in Daniel 12:12, in connection with a prophetically dated judgment, is linked with the blessing that is pronounced in the book of Revelation after that judgment has begun, but before it ends with Christ's coming. The suggestion here then is that the blessing of Daniel 12:12 can probably be viewed as supplementing the blessing of Revelation 14:13 in the NT. The former blesses those privileged to live to see the beginning of the final judgment in heaven, which will reconcile all things. The latter blesses those believers who may die during the time and preaching of that judgment.

Revelation 12

The same prophetic time period found in Daniel 12:7 appears twice in Revelation 12. In verse 14 it appears as 3½ times; in verse 6 it is equated to 1260 days.

Its interpretation follows the same patterns that we find in the literature on Daniel and Revelation generally. Preterists locate the events of this chapter and its time periods back in the first century of the Christian Era. Futurists, especially dispensationalist futurists, place this time period and the persecution associated with it at the end of the age, in the time of a great tribulation occurring in the second half of the last seven years of earth's history. Historicists on the other hand take this prophecy as utilizing symbolic time (= 1260 years) and apply it to the great persecution of the true church during the Dark Ages (538–1798). The differences between these approaches can be noted by a few comments from interpreters.

Preterist approaches. In speaking of the persecution described in Revelation 12, Mounce steps back, as it were, to determine "the underlying cause for the hostility about to break upon the church."[17] He treats the subject of persecution in this chapter rather generally, but interprets verse 6 as follows: "The woman flees into the wilderness to be nourished there by God for 1260 days. The flight of the woman may in part reflect the escape of the Palestinian church to Pella at the outbreak of the Jewish war in A.D. 66. God's children have often been in flight."[18]

J. M. Ford presents a similar first century emphasis by interpreting the woman to be the community of Christians in the first century, and a somewhat restricted community at that: "If the woman is the faithful community, such as one finds at Qumran, it is a community which lives, works, prays, and fights, in the company of the good angels which may even be included in the imagery of the stars round her head."[19] She generalizes in her comment on the time unit. The woman is nourished for 3½ times or 1260 days, "perhaps meaning until the end of the persecution…. It is a time of trial which comes before the final commencement of the kingdom of God. It also represents the opposite of eternity. But it may, in addition, be a messianic number."[20]

Futurist approach. At the other end of the scale we find the dispensationalist interpreter J. F. Walvoord. In this system the woman is not the church, but Israel, as she will exist in the last days during the great tribulation. The time element (1260 days) is literal time but the period occurs at the opposite end of the Christian Age from where preterist interpreters would locate it. Walvoord admits the great gap that must exist between this end-time application of the 1260 day period and the beginning of the age (with Israel as the mother of the Messiah):

> Attention is then directed, however, to the mother of the child, again represented as Israel. Here she is seen in the time of great tribulation as fleeing into the wilderness to a place prepared of God where for 1,260 days she is cared for (again the exact length of three and one-half years). There is obviously a tremendous time lapse between verses 5 and 6, but this is not an uncommon occurrence in prophecy; the first and second comings of Christ are frequently spoken of in the same sentence. Inasmuch as Israel is in comparative tranquillity and safety in the first three and one-half years of Daniel's seventieth week (Dan. 9:27), the reference must be to the preservation of a portion of the nation Israel through the great tribulation to await the second coming of Christ.[21]

A similar comment and application is made of the 3½ times in verse 14 since he considers them to delimit the same period of persecution as mentioned in verse 6. "The time element of Israel's suffering is described as 'a time, and times, and half a time.' This again seems to be a reference to the three and one-half years, the mention of time being one unit, the second reference to times, being two units, which the addition of one-half a time would make three and one-half units. A parallel reference is found in Daniel 7:25 and 12:7 referring to the same period of great tribulation."[22]

Idealist approach. In contrast to the preterist who puts this time period (3½ times; 1260 days) at the beginning of the age and the futurist who puts them at the end of the age, there are those who generalize them more than that. The idealist applies the period to the Christian Age in general. The comments in P. E. Hughes represent this approach:

> There, *nourished* by God, she is enabled to survive for *one thousand two hundred and sixty days*, otherwise defined, in verse 14 below, as "a time and times and a half a time" and, in 13:5, as "forty-two months," that is, for a period of limited duration which is short in comparison with the limitless eternity of peace and freedom that will follow in the new heaven and earth…. The symbolism in St. John's vision depicts the history of the people of God for whom the wilderness is the world in its fallenness and its hostility to the truth.[23]

Hughes follows this with a similar comment on the 3½ times in verse 14. He states more clearly that the time elements (vss. 6, 14) simply symbolize the entire Christian Era:

> This period denotes three and a half years and is the same as the 1,260 days in verse 6 and the forty-two months in 13:5. It symbolizes the time, limited by God, of the church's persecution by Satan on earth, the time, that is, between the comings of Christ.[24]

Historicist approach. The historicist school, following the year-day principle, delimits the 1260 years to a certain portion of the Christian Era, not the era in its totality. The portion of the Christian Era to which this prophetic time period is applied is that of the Dark Ages or Middle Ages when members of the true church of God had to flee to more remote places because of the persecutions launched against them.

Representative of this view is the commentary by U. Smith, already cited above on Daniel 11–12. Smith states this position clearly in his comment on Revelation 12:6—

> The church fled into the wilderness at the time the papacy was firmly established in 538, where it was nourished by the word of God and the ministration of angels during the long, dark, and bloody rule of that power for 1260 years.[25]

He reiterates this view in his comment on Revelation 12:14—

> The mention of the period during which the woman is nourished in the wilderness as "a time and times and half a time," similar phraseology to that used in Daniel 7:25, furnishes a key for the explanation of the latter passage. The same period is called in Revelation 12:6, "a thousand two hundred and threescore days." This shows that a "time" is one year, 360 days; two "times," two years, or 720 days; and "half a time," half a year, or 180 days, making in all 1260 days. These days, being symbolic, signify 1260 literal years.[26]

Thus, the pattern that we find among the expositors is the same as that we encountered in the case of Daniel in the previous section of our study. The preterist interpreters put these prophetic time periods back in times past; the futurist puts them still in the future; and the historicist applies them as extending through history from past times up to modern times. The question is, Which of these views does the text favor? What elements are there in the passage that lend support to one or the other of these interpretations?

Our study in this chapter is on literary structure, context, and contents to see in what way these aspects of the passages under examination address this question. So once more we take up literary structure first. I would say that it is an essential element in understanding the text of Revelation 12.

Once that structure is understood, the pattern it presents lends strong support to the historicist view which sees this text and its time periods as extending through the Christian Era. As a matter of fact, when this aspect of the text is appreciated, it reveals what a remarkable passage this is, covering the era of the church from the first advent of Christ to the final phase of the church before His second coming in a brief 17 verses.

I have treated the literary structure of Revelation 12 in another previous study.[27] Because of the relevance of that study for our present enterprise, a significant portion of that essay is repeated here verbatim. This should give a clear picture of the literary structure present in Revelation 12.

The Literary Structure of Revelation 12

Regardless of any difficulties in interpretation, the progression of thought in Revelation 12 is straightforward. As outlines in the commentaries illustrate, the transitions between that chapter's main thought units or sections are relatively well demarcated.

The narrative opens with a five-verse section depicting a conflict between a glorified woman (vss. 1–2)—commonly interpreted as the church (or Israel as an earlier phase of the church)—and the dragon (vss. 3–4)—commonly interpreted as the devil and/or his earthly agent(s). The particular point of this conflict revolves around the man-child whom the woman delivers. Since this man-child was caught up to the throne of God and is to rule all nations with a rod of iron (vs. 5), he is commonly—though not universally—identified by the commentaries as representing Jesus Christ. Thus, we may identify this initial five-verse section of chapter 12 as describing the early phase of conflict between the dragon and the woman.

The next verse in this narrative (vs. 6) should be seen as transitional to an intermediate section that deals further with the conflict between the dragon and the woman. This transitional verse indicates that having given birth to the man-child, the woman, now more definitely identifiable with the church, found it necessary to flee into the wilderness for the purpose of self-preservation. There she remained, protected by God, for a specified period of time—1260 days.

At this point, the flow of the narrative dealing with the conflict between the dragon and the woman is interrupted to include a parenthetical section (vss. 7–12) which explains the origin of the dragon's enmity toward the woman. This section of the narrative is in part descriptive (vss. 7–9) and in part hymnic (vss. 10–12). The first portion of this central section describes a conflict in heaven between the dragon ("that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan" [vs. 9]) and his angels with Michael, the leader of the angels on God's side. Michael and his host emerged victorious, and the dragon and his host were cast down to earth. The second part of this central section celebrates the defeat of the dragon and warns the inhabitants of earth of his enmity.

Several different interpretations have been given to this central section. Some interpreters see it as a description of a conflict in heaven in which evil originated prior to the creation of mankind. Others see it as a description of the victory gained by God over the devil at the time of the incarnation of Christ. Still others see it as a description of the victory gained by God through Christ's atonement on the cross. Our purpose here is not to give a detailed exegesis or interpretation of this passage. It is rather to see where these verses fit in the literary structure of the chapter. That point is clear, even though commentators may differ in their interpretation of the text itself. These verses provide a central bloc of material in the chapter; and the main flow of the narrative which is more directly concerned with the conflict between the dragon and the woman, resumes following this excursus.

The next section of the narrative, verses 13–16, returns, then, to the subject of the woman in the wilderness, under attack by the dragon. In verse 6, which we have noted above, it is mainly the actions of the woman herself that are in view. That subject is now treated again in verse 14. But verse 15 then continues with the other aspect of the subject—the actions of the dragon toward the woman during her residence in the wilderness. He pursued her there and poured out a great flood upon her to sweep her away. The earth helped the woman, however, and rendered the flood ineffectual (vs. 16). The length of time that the woman was resident in the wilderness is given again, in this instance as "a time, and times, and half a time" (vs. 14), which is equivalent to the 1260 days mentioned earlier in verse 6.

For literary structural purposes, it is important to note how closely the contents of verse 14 correspond to those of verse 6:

Revelation 12:6	*Revelation 12:14*
"And the woman	"But the woman was given the
	two wings of the great eagle that
fled	she might fly from the serpent
into the wilderness,	into the wilderness,
where she has a place	to the place
prepared by God,	
in which to be nourished	where she is to be nourished,
for one thousand two	for [three and one-half times]."
hundred and sixty days."	

A comparison of the Greek phraseology found in these two verses indicates that the same words are used in them for "into the wilderness" and the "place" to which the woman fled. The same verbal root for "nourish" is used in different forms in its two occurrences. While the verbs "to flee" and "to fly" are not the same, they convey a similar idea. Finally, both verses end with a time period, and those time periods should be equated.

From these specific lexical relationships, and also from the general thematic relationships present, it is evident that the content of these two verses makes a direct connection between them and that in fact verse 6 and verses 13–16 form an inclusio around the central section of verses 7–12. Specifically, verse 6 provides an initial statement about the flight of the woman into the wilderness, while verses 13–16 provide an amplifying and concluding statement on the same subject. Thus, the complete or overall statement about the intermediate period of conflict between the dragon and the woman has been divided, and its two parts have been utilized to frame or enclose the central statement about the war between Michael and the dragon in heaven.

The final verse of the chapter, verse 17, refers to the third and final phase of conflict between the dragon and the woman. In this case, at the end of the 1260 days, it is the remnant of her seed or offspring with which the dragon aims at making war. The nature of this final conflict is spelled out in more detail in the subsequent two chapters, which contribute in making up the bloc of prophecies in Revelation 12–14.

There is a certain thematic link between the beginning and the end of Revelation 12. Both deal with the dragon's attack upon the woman's offspring. In the first case, it is her principal offspring, the man-child, that is attacked; and in the latter case, it is the remnant of her offspring that is his target. Furthermore, the man-child at the beginning of the narrative should be interpreted as referring to Jesus, with the remnant at the end of the narrative bearing testimony to Jesus. And finally, in verse 5, the dragon "stood" before the woman when she was about to bear her child, and at the end of the narrative the dragon "stood" upon the sand of the sea. (The same verbal root is present in these two passages. Some hold that this final statement should be connected with Revelation 13, but this lexical correlation suggests that it may be correctly located at the end of Revelation 12.)

From this survey of Revelation 12, the contents of this chapter can now be reduced to a basic outline:

A.	Vss. 1–5	—	Early dragon-woman conflict
B^1.	Vs. 6	—	Intermediate dragon-woman conflict
X.	Vss. 7–12	—	Michael-dragon conflict in heaven
B^2.	Vss. 13–16	—	Intermediate dragon-woman conflict (resumed)
C.	Vs. 17	—	Final dragon-woman conflict

General historical applications. Having outlined the passage in this manner, we may make some general historical applications.[28] Specific details need not be addressed here, but the broad sweep of the chapter can be given in overview. Siding with the majority of commentators (even some of those cited above) who see the woman as the church, we can see portrayed three phases of conflict involving the woman or church.

The first phase of conflict with the devil (vss. 1–5) should refer to the early beginnings of the church. The final conflict (vs. 17) should refer to the final phase of the church here on earth. Between these two poles we encounter the church in the wilderness, the persecuted church. Given the intermediate position of this phase of the church in the narrative, this should be the church of the Middle Ages, that is to say, the true or pure church of that period. The church that was persecuted and driven into the wilderness and the more remote portions of the earth for protection.

Thus, the chapter's narrative presents us with the early church, the pure church of the Middle Ages, and the church of the last days. In one brief span of 17 verses the narrative has covered these three main phases of church history.

At the center of this panorama, the chapter frames the struggle between Christ and Satan, the controversy that stands back of it all. The principle that has been worked out in these phases of church history is the antagonism of the devil and his evil forces arrayed against the church. This is not a new struggle. It began even before there was a church. By placing this scene at the center of his survey, John, under inspiration, has identified the principle being worked out through this era of church history.

It is evident at once that the prophecy's sweep of church history does not fit well with either the preterist or the futurist interpretation. If it supported the preterist interpretation, it should have concentrated only upon the first phase of church history, in the period of the Roman Empire where preterists locate all of this. But its view extends beyond that point, well beyond it. If it supported the futurist view of prophecy, it should have concentrated only upon the final phase of church history. Instead, it starts with the beginning of church history, when the Christ of that church came into the world and then ascended to heaven to minister for it. The evidence is clear that this narrative presents a continuous historical flow through the Christian Era; thus, it is most compatible in its perspective with the historicist or continuous historical view.

Location of time periods. We may also ask the question, Where are the time periods located in this chapter? Are they found in the early, middle, or end phase of the woman's pilgrimage on earth? If the time periods were found in the first segment, they would favor the preterist position. If they were found in the final phase, they would favor the futurist position. But they are found in neither. Rather, the time periods are located in the middle segment of that church history. They are found in connection with the segment which extends through the heart of the age. This is most compatible with the historical view of this prophecy.

In fact, these two combined and linked statements about time (vss. 6, 14) go together to frame the central feature of the chapter, the great controversy in heaven. The writer gives his first statement about time in verse 6. He follows then with a description (vss. 7–12) of the war in heaven between Michael and the dragon. He then returns to the subject of time again, restating in almost identical words the same period of time previously mentioned (vs. 14).

Thus, from the standpoint of linked linguistics, and from the standpoint of literary structure, these paired statements about time belong in the middle of the narrative, in the middle of the history that the chapter narrates, and thus in the Middle Ages of church history. They do not belong, either of them, down at the end of time. End-time church history is not taken up until the last verse of the chapter (vs. 17).

Revelation 13

We come now to a third major statement of prophetic time similar to that presented in Daniel 11–12 and Revelation 12. In those previous narratives the time period was given as either 1260 days or 3½ times. In this new narrative it is given as 42 months (13:5). There can be little doubt that we are talking about the same prophetic and historical period of time, since 42 months, using a schematic prophetic month of a uniform number of 30 days, provides a period of time that likewise equals 3½ years or 1260 days.

Expositors' Interpretations

Preterist approach. Again we find the same distribution of interpretations that we encountered previously in connection with the other two passages studied above. Preterists put these events in the first century A.D., in the period of Imperial Rome. As J. M. Ford plainly states, "the monsters represent the Roman Empire and those who cooperate with her."[29] As for the 42 months of the authority of this beast, Ford relates it, by parallel, with the persecution of the Jews under Antiochus Epiphanes. Thus, it becomes "symbolic of a period of terror and demonic evil before the final victory of God."[30] In this particular case, it may also be related to the desecration of the temple in Jerusalem by either Caligula or Titus (or both).[31]

Futurist approach. Dispensationalists agree that this is the Roman Empire, but it is the revived Roman Empire at the end of time, not the empire of the days of Jesus and the apostles. Thus Walvoord notes, "The identity of this beast is quite clear in its reference to the revived Roman Empire, as the description is similar to that found in Daniel 7:7–8 and in Revelation 12:3 and 17:3, 7. The stage of the empire depicted by the beast is the period after the emergence of the little horn, the future world ruler, displacing three of the horns (Dan 7:8). The description fits the time of the empire during the great tribulation."[32] His position on the 42 months is as to be expected in connection with this interpretation: "His authority [that of the personal future antichrist] continues for forty-two months."[33]

Historicist approach. The historicist interpreters remain consistent here too. The beast is also identified as Rome in this school of thought. Because of the distinctly religious aspects of its character and activities, however, it is identified as the religious phase of the Roman activity, epitomized in the papacy. In this case Imperial Rome (symbolized in a secondary role by the red dragon [chap. 12]), precedes the leopardlike beast (chap. 13). The latter receives from the former its "power, seat, and great authority" (vs. 2). As put briefly by U. Smith, "In verse 1 of Revelation 13 we are carried back to the time when the leopard beast, the successor of the dragon, begins his career. From this power the church suffers war and persecution for the long period of 1260 years."[34] This 1260 year period is, of course, the same which has been described above with the previous prophecies.

The stance, then, of the three interpretive schools is as we have found them in the previous prophecies. Preterists see Revelation 13:1–10 at the beginning of the Christian Era, futurists at the end of the era, and historicists through the course of the era, interpreting the time units here as symbolic rather than literal in nature. For a more definitive identification of the beast power involved, the student naturally needs to work through its symbolic characteristics. This has already been done in the commentaries and need not be repeated here. Our interest is more localized to the time prophecy connected with this beast. Where should this time period be applied?

Locating the Time Period

Why does this question come up? Some interpreters, even some working from the historicist point of view, suggest that this time period should be located *after* the deadly wound is received by the beast rather than before. Locating the time period *before* the deadly wound and leading up to it has been the more common approach among historicist writers in times past.

U. Smith put the relationship this way:

> At the end of the same period [the 1260 years], the leopard beast was himself to be led "into captivity." Revelation 13:10. Both these specifications were fulfilled in the captivity and exile of the pope, and the temporary overthrow of the papacy by France in 1798.[35]
>
> Thus it is evident that it was the papal head that was wounded to death, and whose deadly wound was healed. This wounding is the same as the going into captivity. (Revelation 13:10.) It was inflicted when the pope was taken prisoner by Berthier, the French general, and the papal government was for a time abolished, in 1798.[36]

The view represented by Smith's interpretation, seconded by many other historicist interpreters, is that the 42 months of the prophecy, or 1260 actual historical years, led up to the deadly wound which brought an end to that period of papal domination and religious authority.

More recently, the opposite view has been advocated: that the 42 months should follow some time after the deadly wound. The basis for this interpretation is the order of the text. The deadly wound is referred to in verse 3 and the 42 months are referred to in verse 5. Assuming that the events of this passage are in chronological order, the 42 months time period should follow after the deadly wounding of the beast.

Repeated sequences. This raises the question, Are the events described in this passage given in strict chronological order? The evidence from the passage itself indicates that is not the case. Following a strictly chronological order creates some difficulties in interpretation.

For example, verse 1 notes that the beast had a blasphemous name upon its heads. Verse 5 observes that the beast was given a mouth uttering blasphemous words. If these two episodes are strictly chronological and consecutive, the blasphemy that the beast utters in verse 5 has no relation to the blasphemy upon its heads in verse 1. The *logical* connection is, however, that the blasphemous heads in verse 1 are of such a character that they utter the blasphemous words in verse 5. The two references are connected by nature and action; they should not be separated with one put in the past and the other in the future.

This can also be noted in the case of the word "authority." This is found first in verse 2 where the dragon gives to the sea beast several things including "great authority." Then in verse 5 it is stated that the sea beast is allowed to exercise authority for 42 months. If we take the strictly chronological approach, then we have two different authorities here. The more logical connection is that the authority given in verse 2 is the same authority that is allowed to continue for 42 months according to verse 5.

A similar issue comes up in the case of blasphemy between verse 5 and verse 6. Verse 5 says that the sea beast is given a mouth uttering blasphemies. Then, at the end of that verse the 42 months of its authority are mentioned. Verse 6 begins by identifying what is blasphemed: the name of God, His sanctuary in heaven, and those of earth who have placed their faith there. If these two verses are read in a strictly chronological order, then the blasphemy of verse 6 occurs 42 months or 1260 years later than the blasphemy spoken in verse 5.

But this is not really the case. Verse 1 notes that the name of blasphemy was on the heads of the beast; verse 5 notes that the beast was given a mouth uttering those blasphemies; and verse 6 gives the content of some of those blasphemies. These are all contemporaneous and interrelated actions; they are not separate and distinct and occurring later in time than the previous ones. The development upon the theme of amplifying the matter of blasphemy is supplemented by each additional reference.

Once again the matter of worship may be taken to illustrate the same type of phenomenon in this passage. The end of the first section of this passage describes men worshiping the dragon and the beast (vs. 4). The second section of this passage ends in a similar way, with all who dwell upon the earth worshiping the beast (vs. 8). The two themes are interrelated and occur in similar positions in their respective passages. They should be related to each other, not separated.

We have described various aspects of this text to demonstrate the way in which its terms have been distributed. We have chosen key, thematic, or theological terms in this passage. They include "blasphemy," "authority," and "worship." The same Greek words are used in each of these cases where paired passages are employed.

Hebrew parallelism. The question may now be asked, Why does the passage operate in this manner? Why does it come back to some of these themes over and over again? Why doesn't it just treat each theme once and then move on to another in a linear fashion? The matter for study in this connection is again one of literary structure. *The organizing principle is parallelism of thought*. This is very common in the Bible.

One third of the OT is written in poetry; all Hebrew poetry exercises parallelism of thought. One cannot have Hebrew poetry without it. It also spills over into biblical prose, both in the OT and in the NT. Examples of this are too numerous to mention. So it is not unexpected to find that same principle operating here. It is important, therefore, to note key words which are repeated in the passage.

Two distinct sections. We will divide this portion of the prophecy into its two major sections before working with it in detail. Verses 1–4 form the first section; verses 5–10 form the second. The shift in the use of verbs between these two passages is one indicator that they are distinct; the nature of the contents described is also different.

The first section describes what John saw—the vision proper. The second describes actions that took place thereafter. The verb "I saw" (*eidon*) occurs twice in the first section (vss. 1–2); it does not occur at all in the second. Both sections close with a verse that tells about the worship of the world toward the beast. This occurs in verse 4 in the first section and in verse 8 in the second section. They are compared further below.

While the first section in this passage is descriptive (visual) in emphasis, the second section is didactic in its emphasis. This arrangement makes these two sections relate to each other as vision and audition, or vision and explanation. When this functional relationship is understood, it can be seen that the second section explains what was seen in the first section.

The vision's description (vss. 1–4). The description of the beast in the first section begins with its rise from the sea. The first parts to appear are its heads and horns. A further description is given of these features: The horns have crowns and the heads have the name of blasphemy upon them. The description continues as the beast rises further out of the sea. Its body, which looks like a leopard's, is seen next; and its feet, which are like a bear's, are seen last. The attention of the prophet is then turned back to the mouth of the beast. It was like the mouth of a lion. The reason why the prophet's attention is turned to the mouth is because its speech is an important element in the subsequent explanatory section of the vision. The scene shifts now to describe what the dragon of chapter 12 did for this sea beast of chapter 13. He gave him three things: power, a throne, and great authority. John's attention was then drawn to one of the heads. Six of the seven heads looked healthy, but one of them had been wounded. Indeed, the wound looked so serious that it appeared to have been fatal. But the wound had now healed over and that head too was alive again. The passage concludes with statements on the worship of the dragon and beast by the world.

The vision's explanation (vss. 5–10). The second section is distinctive in terms of its verbal contents. It contains four phrases that start in exactly the same form in the original Greek, *kai edothē autō* ("and there was given unto him ..."). The phrase occurs twice in verse 5 and twice in verse 7. Each time the phrase introduces something that is given to the beast. The first "given" is a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies. The second is authority. The third thing given is the ability to make war on the saints. The fourth "given" is authority over the nations. Then the passage concludes, as did the first one, with a statement of worship by the world.

It should be clear from this sketch of the two sections that we encounter first the vision of the beast and next the description of its actions by way of explanation. Both sections end in the same way: with the description of worship by the world. This double description of worship not only serves to divide the passage, but also to emphasize the unity of the prophecy. This brief outline may be charted:

Chart 4

Revelation 13:1–10 Two Sections

Description	Explanation
vss. 1–3	vss. 5–7
Worship	Worship
vs. 4	vs. 8

Links between sections. We turn now to examine the links between the two sections, between the description and the explanation. We have already noted some of these in a negative way, to demonstrate that we cannot follow a strictly chronological approach to this passage. We examine these relationships now according to their intended functions.

The first linking word is "mouth" (*stoma*), and its associated word, "blasphemy" (*blasphēmia*). The mouth of the beast is described as the mouth of a lion (vs. 2). When the mouth goes into operation (vs. 5), it speaks haughty words (against the Most High, cf. Dan 7:25) and blasphemy. The mouth in verse 5 is functionally linked to the mouth seen previously in verse 2, and the blasphemy heard here (vs. 5) is linked to the name of blasphemy seen written out on the heads (vs. 1). Verse 6 then takes up the theme of blasphemy again and tells exactly what is blasphemed: God, His name, and His heavenly sanctuary.

A pair of phrases which begin "and there was given to him" (*kai edothē autō*) occurs in verse 7. There they describe two groups of people. The first consists of the saints. The beast was permitted to make war against them and defeat them. The second group consists of the rest of the world's populations. In contrast to the saints who attempted to withstand the beast, this group acquiesced to it and eventually will go so far as to worship it. Hence the contrast between the two groups: those opposed to it and those who agree to side with it and even worship it.

The way in which the persecution of the saints is phrased is interesting in view of the previous statement about the time period given to the beast for its authority—42 months. These two lines of text should be compared in a literal translation and in transliteration:

vs. 5b			"And it was given to him	authority to make		(X) months, forty and two."			
	kai	*edothē*	*autō*	*exousia*	*poiēsai*	*mēnas*	*40*	*kai 2*	
vs. 7a	*kai*	*edothē*	*autō*	*poiēsai*	*polēmon*	*meta tōn hagiōn kai nikēsai*			
			"And it was given to him	to make war		with the saints and defeat [them]"			

The phrase in verse 7a is the only one of these four donation phrases in which the word order is reversed. Normally, after the introductory donation phrase the noun referring to the object donated is stated next. That is not the case here in 7a. Instead it is a verb (*poiēsai*) "to do, make" that follows. But this is the same verb that is found in verse 5b. This is commonly translated in such a way as to use the word "authority" which precedes it as an object. But that is not really the case. The beast was given authority to do something, not to exercise authority.

But what was it given authority to do? That is left for the next donation phrase to say. According to verse 7a that authority was to make war on the saints. Thus the linguistic and structural arrangement and relations here indicate that the beast's authority was to be exercised especially in making war against the saints. This feature of the text brings it into line with the passages we have discussed above—Daniel 11–12 and Revelation 12. In both passages this same time period was especially and above all one of persecution of the saints.

The links of the word "authority" (*exousia*) between these two passages should also be noted. According to 13:2 the dragon gave to the sea beast power, seat, and *great (megalēn) authority (exousia)*. Then, according to verse 5, the sea beast goes on to exercise that authority (*exousia*) for 42 months. Indeed, the length of time that the beast exercises that authority is one reason why it is great.

It is also of interest that these two words (great/authority) are paired in verse 2, but are then distributed in verse 5. In verse 2 it is the authority that is great (*exousian megalēn*). In verse 5 the word for great (*megala*) is used independently to refer to the great things or "haughty" (RSV) words that the beast speaks against God; then in the next phrase the word authority (*exousia*) appears. What appears as a word pair in the first passage is broken up and distributed to successive phrases in the second instance, thereby pointing to a direct relationship between the two sections.

There are two other interesting word links present here. One is the verb "to worship" (*proskuneō*). In verse 4 (in the first section) it is used in an aorist form, but in verse 8 (the second section) it is used in a future form. The latter has been commonly taken as a Hebraism for a verb which equals an imperfect or present tense. However, the reverse could be taken for its occurrence in verse 4. If one takes the aorist in verse 4 as reflecting a Hebrew "prophetic perfect" as used by the OT prophets (a past tense to describe a future event), then it would fit well with the visionary nature of that passage ("men ... will worship the dragon.... and they will worship the beast"). If this explanation is correct, it would harmonize verse 4 with verse 8, placing that action in the future from John's time into the era specified by the prophecy.

The other word of note here is the word for "wound" which the head of the beast receives in a "deadly" form according to verse 3 (*sphazō*). The same word is used for Christ as the slain lamb (5:6, 9, 12). Those who are excluded from the heavenly kingdom are those who are not written in the book of the Lamb who was "slain" (wounded) from the foundation of the world (13:8). The same word is used in both passages, and thus a contrast is drawn between the beast and the "Lamb." Both received a wound that was deadly, but came back to life—One to work for the redemption of mankind, the other for its destruction.

In the description section (vss. 1–4), the wounding of the beast comes toward the close of the passage (vs. 3). In the explanation section (vss. 5–10) this wounding is also alluded to at the end of the passage ("If any one slays with the sword, with the sword must he be slain," vs. 10; cf. vs. 14, "the beast which was wounded by the sword"). In both cases the literary structure and relations involved indicate that the authority that the beast exercises comes *before* that wounding.

There is also a natural and logical link from the giving of authority to its exercise between the first passage (vs. 2) and the second (vs. 5).

As the many literary structural relations presented here and the linguistic links between the sections show, a parallelism of thought is carried out by John as he described the vision of the beast that he sees and the explanation of the vision that he receives. The two parts form one whole.

The strictly chronological reading of this passage cannot be applied, because that procedure would not make any sense out of the multiple parallels here. The more logical understanding of the two sections is that the second is an explanation of the first and that puts the 42 months time period in relationship to events in the first passage which occurred before the deadly wound was seen. The traditional order and relations commonly followed by historicist interpreters is the correct one from the standpoint of these newly observed contextual relations.

This means the 42 months of the time prophecy should lead up to the deadly wound, not follow. It also means that the occurrence of the deadly wound makes an excellent demarcator for the end of that time period. In terms of the flow of history that fits well with ending this period in 1798 as has been described by the historicist commentator Smith cited above.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have examined three biblical passages that contain prophetic time elements: Daniel 12, Revelation 12, and Revelation 13. One time period is common to all three. The 3½ times of Daniel 12:7 equals the 3½ times of Revelation 12:14, which in turn equals the 1260 days of Revelation 12:6 and finally the 42 months of Revelation 13:5. In addition, two more time periods are found in Daniel 12: the 1290 and the 1335 days.

We have not sought to make very direct historical applications of these time periods in this study. Our intent has been otherwise. Our purpose was to see what information the text itself supplies for locating these time periods in the sweep of history.

The locating of the time periods in Daniel 12 cannot be determined on the basis of that narrative alone. These verses form only the conclusion of Daniel's fourth vision. Comparison must be made with Daniel 11, the body of that same vision. When that comparison is carried out, it can be seen that the dates in Daniel 12 do not represent a wishful extension of the time that the prophet guessed at (preterist view). Rather, they are each connected with specific events narrated in the flow of the history described in the body of the vision.

The 3½ times and the 1290 days belong in loci (Dan 11:31–35) prior to the time of the end that is mentioned in Daniel 11:40. The 1335 day period also has its roots in the same Daniel 11 location. This means that the historicist view, which places these time periods as standing symbolically for much longer periods of historical time in the flow of the historical process, fits best with the contents of the Daniel 12 passage.

The situation in Revelation 12 is somewhat different. Here the two time periods (3½ times; 1260 days) are found in relationship to each other in the structure of the narrative itself. They are placed in the middle or core of the narrative about the church; they do not belong at either pole of that history. Thus they are best applied to the Middle Ages or, as this age of persecution has been designated, the Dark Ages.

Those time periods (the two symbols in actuality denote the same era) span that period and take the narration of church history down to the beginning of its final period, the time when the remnant seed of the woman take the stage for action. Again, the envelope construction of this narrative and the particular points at which the time periods are located support the historicist interpretation precisely. The data do not point to either a preterist or futurist interpretation.

The literary structure of Revelation 13 with its time period of 42 months features yet another Hebrew thought pattern. Here parallelism of statements operates. The vision of the beast is described in the first section of that narrative (vss. 1–4) and this is followed by the explanation of that vision (vss. 5–10). This means that this narrative (vss. 1–10) cannot be read in a straight, linear sequence; rather, it must be understood as going over the same ground twice.

In this instance, the second section, which supplies the explanation, includes the time period. We cannot see a time period, but we can see the actions that the beast carried out, like persecuting, speaking blasphemy, and exercising authority over the people of the earth. We have to be told how long these things were to last. For that reason the time period occurs in the part of the text which deals with the explanation.

The place where the time period connects with the preceding description indicates that it belongs to those activities of the beast which were to occur before that power received its deadly wound. Even though that deadly wound was to be healed, this time period measured off the years up to that wounding, not afterwards.

By showing that the 3½ times (and the 1290 days) of Daniel 12 belong to the middle of the historical flow of Daniel 11, by showing that the two time periods of persecution in Revelation 12 (3½ times; 1260 days) belong to the middle of the Christian Age, and by showing that the 42 months of the beast belong to the time before its wound was received, we have demonstrated that the historicist interpretation of these time prophecies is soundly based in the features of the passages. The preterist view which puts all of these back in the more remote past—with Antiochus Epiphanes (second century B.C.) or the Caesars (first century A.D.)—and the futurist view which puts all of them in the still unfulfilled future do not draw strong support from the text and are therefore untenable.

III

Appendices

Ellen G. White and Revelation 4–6
457 B.C. Verified

Appendix A

Ellen G. White and Revelation 4–6

Jon Paulien

The purpose of this appendix is to clarify, as far as possible, the views Ellen White has expressed in writing about the prophecy in Revelation 4–6. All the statements in the available Scripture indexes to the writings of Ellen White on this section of Revelation have been examined. However, space will permit discussion of only a few that are considered especially pertinent to the Adventist interpretation of this passage.

Those who may think a particular statement is either "misinterpreted" or "ignored" should recognize that this appendix is not written as "the final word," but is intended to stimulate discussion and encourage careful application of the suggested method of study[1] to controverted points.

The Broader Context

The closest thing to a major interpretive statement for the entire first half of the book of Revelation is found in the book *The Great Controversy*.[2] Here Ellen White offers a clear statement regarding the significance of the sanctuary material in Revelation 4, 8, and 11:

> The holy places of the sanctuary in heaven are represented by the two apartments in the sanctuary on earth. As in vision the apostle John was granted a view of the temple of God in heaven, he beheld there "seven lamps of fire burning before the throne." Revelation 4:5. He saw an angel "having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne." Revelation 8:3. Here the prophet was permitted to behold the first apartment of the sanctuary in heaven; and he saw there the "seven lamps of fire" and "the golden altar," represented by the golden candlestick and the golden altar of incense in the sanctuary on earth. Again, "the temple of God was opened" (Revelation 11:19), and he looked within the inner veil, upon the holy of holies. Here he beheld "the ark of His testament," represented by the sacred chest constructed by Moses to contain the law of God.

There is no question that Ellen White had these specific Bible passages in mind as she wrote. The statement also appears to be an attempt to explain the significance of the author's original vision regarding these matters. The passage is drawn from one of her major works and is central to the discussion of the sanctuary in its context.[3] However, the purpose of the chapter is not to exegete the intention of the Revelator. The passage may, therefore, qualify more as a theological statement than exegetical.

Be that as it may, this statement is Ellen White's most comprehensive statement on the meaning of Revelation 4–11. Thus, it is of first importance for understanding her view of the meaning of this portion of the book. It seems evident from this statement that Ellen White understood the events of the seals and the trumpets to be taking place under the rubric of the first apartment of the heavenly sanctuary. The Second Apartment ministry comes into view only in Revelation 11:19.

While this may seem a major conclusion to draw from just a few words, Ellen White clarified this statement in a *Review and Herald* article published on November 9, 1905. There she repeats the above statement with the following addition:

> The announcement, "The temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament," points to the opening of the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary, at the end of the twenty-three hundred days—in 1844—as Christ entered there to perform the closing work of the atonement. Those who by faith followed their great High Priest, as he entered upon his ministry in the most holy place, beheld the ark of the testament.

The title of the article is "The Ark of the Covenant." If Ellen White had considered it appropriate to indicate that the ark should be equated with the throne in Revelation 4–5, or with the activity in Revelation 8:3–4, this would have been the ideal place to do so. Instead, she makes it clear that Revelation 11:19 (forming the sanctuary introduction to Revelation 12–14—the section that features the three angels' messages) is the point at which Revelation begins to concentrate on the end-time judgment.

On close analysis these citations call into question the assertions some are making that the Ellen White writings support a day of atonement or end-time setting for the seals and trumpets as a whole. Such a position cannot be maintained in light of the fact that there are no clear and explicit statements from her pen to that effect, and the citations we have noted seem to imply otherwise.

End-Time Significance of Revelation 5

There is only one statement that I am aware of that imputes unusual importance to any part of Revelation 4–6. That statement is found in *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 9.

> Those who humble their hearts and confess their sins will be pardoned. Their transgressions will be forgiven. But the man who thinks that should he confess his sins he would show weakness, will not find pardon, will not see Christ as his Redeemer, but will go on and on in transgression, making blunder after blunder and adding sin to sin. What will such a one do in the day that the books are opened and every man is judged according to the things written in the books?
>
> The fifth chapter of Revelation needs to be closely studied. It is of great importance to those who shall act a part in the work of God for these last days. There are some who are deceived. They do not realize what is coming on the earth. Those who have permitted their minds to become beclouded in regard to what constitutes sin are fearfully deceived. Unless they make a decided change they will be found wanting when God pronounces judgment upon the children of men. They have transgressed the law and broken the everlasting covenant, and they will receive according to their works.[4]

The statement is part of an address read to the General Conference session of 1909 entitled, "A Distribution of Responsibility." The first half concerns the need to make wise choices where the leadership of the church is concerned. The latter half (pp. 265–69) is a series of warnings made up largely of quotations from Matthew 11:20–30; Revelation 6:12–17; Revelation 7:9–17; Luke 21:33–36; and Matthew 24:42–51. The above statement precedes the quotation of Revelation 6:12–17.

The statement is more ambiguous than we would like. It is clear that Revelation 5 is intended to play a significant role for those who are to act a part in the closing up of earth's history. But it is not clear what that role is. Does Ellen White understand the chapter itself to be end-time? Is there an event portrayed there that is of particular importance to those who live at the end? Are there timeless theological truths there that will play their usual role also at the end? Is the passage inspirational because of its clear depiction of heavenly praise and worship? She does not say. A blank space is left, as it were, to be filled in by the reader.

One possibility lies in the mention of judgment both before and after the reference to chapter 5. But this section of the address is neither an exegesis of Revelation 5 nor a theology of judgment. The previous statement associates judgment with the opening of the books, while in Revelation 5 the single book remains sealed until after the scene, so there is no explicit connection there. The later statement leads into the quotation of Revelation 6:12–17 where the Second Coming with its judgment is in view. Therefore, there is no explicit connection in her appeal to study Revelation 5 with these two references to judgment.

The soundest way to determine the reason for Ellen White's emphasis on the importance of Revelation 5 for those who live in the last days is to read all her statements regarding that chapter.[5] When this procedure is followed, the reader is impressed by her repeated use of the chapter as an inspiring vision of heaven that can motivate the church on earth.

"Who can be trifling, who can engage in frivolous, common talk, while by faith he sees the Lamb that was slain pleading before the Father …?" "By faith let us look upon the rainbow round about the throne."[6] "Think of Jesus, He is in His holy place…."[7] "In view of the revelation made to John on the Isle of Patmos, … how can those who claim to see wondrous things out of the law of God, be found in the list of the impure, of the fornicators and adulterers …"[8]

After quoting portions of Revelation 5 she says,

> Will you catch the inspiration of the vision? Will you let your mind dwell upon the picture? Will you not be truly converted, and then go forth to labor in a spirit entirely different from the spirit in which you have labored in the past …?[9]
>
> If we would permit our minds to dwell more upon Christ and the heavenly world, we should find a powerful stimulus and support in fighting the battles of the Lord. Pride and love of the world will lose their power as we contemplate the glories of that better land so soon to be our home. Beside the loveliness of Christ, all earthly attractions will seem of little worth.[10]

In these kinds of statements we find, perhaps, the best clue to Ellen White's view of the significance of Revelation 5 in the last days. It is the clearest and most exciting depiction of heavenly worship in all of Scripture. Those who meditate upon this scene will find encouragement and motivation to remain faithful to the end, even as their spiritual forefathers in earlier times found encouragement and motivation in the same passage.

Did Ellen White associate the scene of Revelation 5 with any particular event in history? *The Desire of Ages* ties the entire scene of Revelation 4–5 to Christ's ascension and His subsequent enthronement in the heavenly sanctuary.[11] There is no question that Ellen White has Revelation 4–5 in mind in this passage, and that this scripture plays a central role in the passage. Her statement is found in one of her major books, and it is in harmony with the most natural understanding of the Bible text.

However, although the events of Revelation 5 originally took place at a particular point in time, we should not insist that the three hymns of acclamation (vss. 9–13) were sung only once. No doubt they enter the repertoire of the ongoing worship services in the heavenly sanctuary.

Thus, Ellen White can quote from this section in the context of what is happening in heaven now,[12] yet can also quote verses 9–13 in the context of the experience of the redeemed as they enter the heavenly courts after the Second Coming.[13] This application is supported by the observation that the song of verse 13 presupposes the involvement of the entire creation, an event only fully realized after the destruction of sin and sinners at the close of the millennium.

Some suggest that a statement written in a letter by Ellen White in 1900 indicates that she understood Christ's taking of the book (Rev 5:7) to have occurred in 1844, not A.D. 31.[14] Let us examine this statement with some care.

> John writes, "I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne." Angels were united in the work of Him who had broken the seals and taken the book. Four mighty angels hold back the powers of this earth till the servants of God are sealed in their foreheads. The nations of the world are eager for conflict; but they are held in check by the angels. When this restraining power is removed, there will come a time of trouble and anguish.

It is evident that the paragraph's initial sentence is from Revelation 5:11. According to the argument Ellen White's statement, in effect, places Revelation 5:11 *after* the breaking of the seals. Since Revelation 5:11 contains an allusion to Daniel 7:9–10, it is further argued that its location is in the Most Holy Place at the time of judgment. Thus, it is concluded that the reception of the book and the breaking of the seals occur in the Most Holy Place from 1844 on. When the Lamb "came and took the book" (vs. 7, KJV), it is asserted that He is moving from the holy place into the Most Holy.[15]

While this kind of reasoning is both flawed and strained, it does raise questions about the intent of the Ellen White statement. It deserves a closer examination. First, it certainly associates Revelation 5:11 with the events of Revelation 7:1–3, which are end-time. However, *her statement is a general description of the work of angels*. And Ellen White repeatedly uses the language of Revelation 5:11 in general descriptions of the ministry of angels.[16] Therefore, it is quite possible that we are dealing with a general Ellen White statement on angel ministry and should not overrate the citation of verse 11 for interpretive purposes in this instance.

More problematic is the phrase in her second sentence: "the work of Him who had broken the seals and taken the book." This reverses the order of the biblical text. It seems to place the breaking of the seals in the past from her perspective.[17]

The statement is taken from Letter 79,1900, written on May 10 of that year. The letter is a rambling appeal to a William Kerr, calling for a fuller commitment to the gospel and to obedience to God's commandments. Ellen White's personal journal indicates that she was extremely weak and weary from overwork and sleeplessness on that day,[18] which would account for the rambling nature of the letter.[19] It nears its conclusion with a general description of the work of angels in helping God's people obey.[20] There is no reference to the investigative judgment.

The statement we are examining is found nowhere else in her writings. Nor is it central to the point of the letter which is quite homiletical in its thrust. Such an isolated statement in an unpublished letter should not be used to overturn the impact of careful exegesis and such major published statements as *The Great Controversy*, pages 414–415, and *The Desire of Ages*, pages 833–835.[21] The fact that she was extremely tired on that day may account for her confusion regarding the timing of the breaking of the seals and the order in which the breaking of the seals and the taking of the book took place.[22]

The Sealed Scroll

Ellen White makes a handful of brief statements with regard to the sealed scroll of Revelation 5. She appears to suggest in *Testimonies to Ministers*, page 115, that the sealed scroll is the book of Daniel. After quoting Daniel 12:8–13 she says, "It was the Lion of the tribe of Judah who unsealed the book and gave to John the revelation of what should be in these last days."

After paraphrasing Daniel for some lines[23] she states, "The book of Daniel is unsealed in the revelation to John, and carries us forward to the last scenes of this earth's history."

It is clear from the statement that the book of Daniel is unsealed in the book of Revelation. What is less clear is whether the scroll of chapter 5 itself is the book of Daniel in her thinking. Other statements make it more likely that she understood the scroll to contain the full account of human history, much as an exegesis of the passage indicates ("a book of destiny").[24] Her statement in *Christ's Object Lessons*, page 294, fits that conclusion well:

> Thus the Jewish leaders made their choice. Their decision was registered in the book which John saw in the hand of Him that sat upon the throne, the book which no man could open. In all its vindictiveness this decision will appear before them in the day when this book is unsealed by the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

The scroll contains both the history and the destiny of the world:

> The light we have received upon the third angel's message is the true light. The mark of the beast is exactly what it has been proclaimed to be. Not all in regard to this matter is yet understood, nor will it be understood until the unrolling of the scroll; but a most solemn work is to be accomplished in our world.[25]

Both statements suggest that Ellen White understood the full unrolling of the scroll as a matter for the future, not the past (such as 1844).

More recently, a letter has come to light which contains a fairly clear statement on the identity of the scroll.[26] After quoting Revelation 5:1–3 she states,

> There in His open hand lay the book, the roll of the history of God's providences, the prophetic history of nations and the church. Herein was contained the divine utterances, His authority, His commandments, His laws, the whole symbolic counsel of the Eternal, and the history of all ruling powers in the nations. In symbolic language was contained in that roll the influence of every nation, tongue, and people from the beginning of earth's history to its close.
>
> This roll was written within and without. John says: [Rev 5:4–5; 5:8–14; 6:8–11; 8:1–4, quoted].

This explicit statement about the scroll of Revelation 5 indicates that it contains the entire sweep of the great controversy between good and evil as it pertains to this earth, including both the acts of God and His created beings throughout their history. There are only two points in human history which sum up all things. One is in Christ at the cross;[27] the other is at the close of the Millennium when all history is laid open to view.[28] Since the preadvent judgment, associated with the year 1844, is limited according to Ellen White to those who have professed faith in God,[29] her statement here would not pinpoint that year (1844) as the time when the Lamb took the book.

The most likely reference point for this statement is Christ's enthronement in heaven as our King-Priest in A.D. 31 (Acts 5:31). Note that the scroll contains "the roll of the history of God's providences," an appropriate designation for the OT era, and the *prophetic* history of nations and the church, a statement most appropriate at the beginning of the Christian Era, not near its close.

Combining all of the above, it appears that Ellen White understood the scroll of Revelation to be the sum and substance of history, prophecy, and the entire plan and purpose of God. As such it contains that to which both Daniel and Revelation point and more. As such it is not fully opened to view until the end of history. It is truly the "book of destiny."

Interpreting the Seals

There is a paucity of statements associated with the seals of Revelation 6. Most of Ellen White's scriptural allusions to the seals have to do with the souls under the altar in the fifth seal and the heavenly signs mentioned in the sixth seal. There is, however, one most interesting reference to the horsemen of Revelation 6:1–8.

The same spirit is seen today that is represented in Revelation 6:6–8. History is to be reenacted. That which has been will be again. This spirit works to confuse and to perplex. Dissension will be seen in every nation, kindred, tongue, and people; and those who have not had a spirit to follow the light that God has given through His living oracles, through His appointed agencies, will become confused. Their judgment will reveal weakness. Disorder and strife and confusion will be seen in the church.[30]

This statement in its context is unquestionably a citation of the biblical text of the seals. The first two sentences imply that the third and fourth seals (Rev 6:6–8) refer to historical realities that are past, but the spirit of which continues in Ellen White's present and future. Her statement as a whole implies that the third and fourth seals represent spiritual confusion and perplexity in the church.

These seals have their historical fulfillment in the corrupted church of the Middle Ages, but the principle of confusion and apostasy is not limited to that period of history.

In *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 5, page 614, she alludes to the third seal.

> In view of the infinite price paid for man's redemption, how dare any professing the name of Christ treat with indifference one of His little ones? How carefully should brethren and sisters in the church guard every word and action lest they hurt the oil and the wine! How patiently, kindly, and affectionately should they deal with the purchase of the blood of Christ!

This echo of biblical language suggests that the oil and wine represent those who believe in Jesus. If so, the command of Revelation 6:6 not to hurt the oil and the wine symbolizes God's protecting care for His "little ones."

Of the roughly half dozen statements alluding to the souls under the altar in the fifth seals, one applies the cry of the martyrs to the persecutions of the OT era![31] Two apply the cry of the martyrs in a general sense.[32] The cry represents God's continuing awareness of the injustice in the world. Other statements clearly imply an end-time setting, although even here (with the possible exception of Manuscript 39, 1906) the usage is primarily in a general sense rather than as a specific exegetical interpretation.[33]

This multiple focus and application is underscored by an exegesis of the passage.[34] The souls under the altar are the product of persecution throughout history leading up to the time of their cry. That cry is prior to the preadvent judgment (cf. Rev 6:10). The fact that the cry receives a partial response implies that the judgment has begun within the seal subsequent to the time of the cry. The last part of the seal has entered into the time of judgment and anticipates the final persecution of earth's history. So an end-time focus is not inappropriate within a broad historical perspective, but the seal as a whole covers a broader scope than just the end-time.

It is evident that Ellen White understands the fifth seal to be figurative. When she discusses the sixth seal, however, she sees it in literal terms. The earthquake of Revelation 6:12 is identified with the Lisbon quake of 1755. The signs in the sun, moon, and stars are tied to those predicted by Christ.[35] These are identified with the Dark Day, May 19, 1780, and the meteoric shower of November 13, 1833, both occurring in North America.[36] The dramatic events of Revelation 6:14, on the other hand, are associated with the return of Christ.[37] The despairing cry of the wicked to be hidden from the wrath of God and the Lamb is likewise understood to take place at Christ's second advent.[38]

Conclusion

Many of the statements in which Ellen White utilizes language reminiscent of Revelation are at times ambiguous. However, her clearest, most exegetical statements, are supportive of the exegesis of the text itself.

Appendix B

When Did the Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9:24 Begin?*

William H. Shea

In the first year of Darius the Mede (538 B.C.), Daniel, the prophet and Babylonian court official, set about offering up to God earnest prayers on behalf of the exiles from Judah.

In his prayer (Dan 9:1–19) Daniel pled with the Lord to forgive His rebellious people and restore them to their land and capital city. He sought the Lord for the fulfillment of His promises to the prophets that Jerusalem and its temple would be rebuilt after the destruction that it suffered.

God answered Daniel's prayer. He saw to it that His people were sent back to their homeland by Cyrus (Ezra 1, 2), rebuilt the temple (Ezra 5, 6), and eventually rebuilt the city of Jerusalem (Neh 1–5, 6:15–16). And God went beyond Daniel's requests. Through the prophetic word transmitted by Gabriel (Dan 9:21–23), God gave Daniel instruction about the Messiah who was to come to His people after the city and temple were rebuilt.

In this prophecy, God designated the time when the Messiah would come. It was to be marked off from the time of the event Daniel had been praying about, the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Gabriel said to Daniel, "Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the word to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times" (Dan 9:25, translated by auithor).

Clearly, this remarkable prophecy is a major prophetic landmark. It offers a valuable criterion by which the true Messiah could be distinguished from false ones. If a person claiming to be the Messiah did not come at the right time, he could not be the true Messiah. Given this major significance of this prophecy we do well to pay careful attention to its details. The minor focus of our study of this prophecy will be on the length of time involved; our major focus will be on its starting point. We will deal briefly with the length of time first.

The Time Period

A. Length. The first matter to deal with in terms of the length of the period has to do with the units by which it was to be measured off. Older translations such as the KJV translated the word involved here as "weeks," while a more recent one, the NIV, prefers the translation of "sevens." The net effect of both translations is the same length of time, for those commentators who prefer the translation of "sevens" acknowledge that they are sevens of years.[1] For those who retain the older translation of "weeks," each of the weeks is made up of seven prophetic days, and each prophetic day is taken as a historical year according to the apocalyptic hermeneutical principle of a day for a year. (See Ezek 4:6; Num 14:34).[2] Thus the only real difference between the two schools of thought is whether or not the year-day principle needs to be invoked here. In both cases the total number of years comes out to 483 years ($7 + 62 \times 7 = 483$). While the translation of the crucial word is of interest, it need not detain us, for the linguistic evidence relevant to the question still favors the translation "weeks."[3] Even the NIV puts "weeks" in the margin.

B. Punctuation and division. The other question involved with the length of time before the Messiah would come has to do with punctuation. Should the passage be translated in such a way as to indicate that the seven weeks and the sixty-two weeks belong together as a compound unit, or in such a way as to apply it to two separate events. Some modern translations separate them, whereas older translations keep them together. The RSV, in speaking of the prince, says that "there shall be seven weeks." Then after inserting a period to close the sentence, it begins a new sentence, "Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again." This punctuation gives the seven weeks to the prince and allows sixty-two weeks for the reconstruction of the city. But if the two time units are kept together, then both the seven and the sixty-two weeks must be fulfilled before the Prince could come.

The rationale by which these time units have been separated in translations, such as the RSV, involves the amount of stress and weight put on the punctuation mark, *'athnāḥ*, in the Hebrew text as pointed by the Massoretes. There are a number of problems with this treatment. In the first place, an *'athnāḥ* is not a *sôph pāsûq*, just as a comma is not a period. A *sôph pāsûq* ends verses of the Hebrew text just as a period ends an English sentence, but the *'athnāḥ* is used only at the approximate middle of the Hebrew sentence, in contrast to the comma, which sets off phrases. To divide the Hebrew sentence into two sentences with a period as a divider in English just because an *'athnāḥ* is located in the middle of it goes far beyond the significance of the *'athnāḥ*, turning it into a *sôph pāsûq*. Doing such a thing is not warranted by the Hebrew accent and is not good translating.

The arbitrary nature of the RSV punctuation here can be borne out by a comparison with what it has done with the rest of Daniel 9. No other examples occur in the RSV text of Daniel 9 in which an *'athnāhò* is represented with a period. Further, there are four cases in which the RSV does not represent even a *sôph pāsûq* with a period. Daniel 9:1 treats a *sôph pāsûq* as a hyphen, verse 4 as a comma, and verses 5, 20 as a semicolon. When measured against its own practice, what the RSV has done with the *'athnāḥ* in Daniel 9:25 is not only poor translating but also quite an arbitrary case of special pleading. The older paired translation of the time units should be retained. Even the LXX supports the paired translation in this case.

The Starting Point

Our conclusion thus far is that the seven and sixty-two weeks in Daniel 9:25 belong together as a compound making up sixty-nine weeks or 483 historical years until the coming of the Messiah. If the starting point for this period can be found, then the date for His coming 483 years later can be fixed. So we turn next to the important starting point.

Daniel 9:25 states that the starting point was to be a going forth of a "word" (Hebrew *dāḇār*) to restore Jerusalem. Before looking for specific decrees and the actual rebuilding, we should ask a few questions about the term, "word."

A. The Decree. The reason why the term comes up is because an effort has been made by some historical-critical scholars to equate this "word" in Daniel 9:25 with the "word of the Lord to Jeremiah" to which Daniel referred in verse 2 of this chapter.[4] Daniel was studying the scroll of Jeremiah about the prophecy of the desolation of Jerusalem for seventy years. Jerusalem was to be restored at the end of that period. Because the message that came to Jeremiah was termed a "word" and the same Hebrew term was used in Daniel 9:25, should they be equated? Doing so would place the commencement of the 70 weeks of Daniel back in the time of Jeremiah, about 593 B.C.

This type of interpretation overlooks the fact that the term for "word" is used again twice in Daniel 9:23. If one is to look for linguistic connections, here in verse 23 is a far more reasonable one to use than the reference in verse 2 to the time of Jeremiah.

But even here there is a difference between the "word" of Gabriel's introduction and the "word" in the prophecy itself. In the first part of verse 23, Gabriel told Daniel that a word had gone forth (*yāṣā'*), obviously from God who sent the message to Daniel. The fact that the perfect form of the verb is used indicates that the word had already gone forth, and having gone forth it had reached Gabriel, who was now going to give it to Daniel. The reference is to a past action or communication which Daniel is now to understand.

But the word which Daniel is to understand is not the decree for the rebuilding of Jerusalem. It is the entire prophecy, all of which constitutes this particular "word." Thus the "word" about the reconstruction of Jerusalem was contained in the entire overall prophetic word or message that Gabriel brought to Daniel. That word was a description of future events. And one of those future events was to be the going forth of the "word" or decree to rebuild Jerusalem. Thus the "word" of verse 25 is neither the word of the Lord to Jeremiah in verse 2 nor the word of the Lord through Gabriel to Daniel in verse 23. It is something to be fulfilled in the future. For corroboration we note that the term for "going forth" (Hebrew *mōṣā'*) that is used in verse 25 is neither the term that is used for the word in verse 2 (Hebrew *hāyāh*) nor the verb used in verse 23 (Hebrew *yāṣā'*). A further contrast between verse 2 and verse 25 is that the former is specifically "the word of the Lord," in a construct chain with God's name in the genitive relationship, whereas in verse 25 it is just "a word" with neither a divine name nor an article used with it.

B. The king of the decree. The next point to be covered here is what it was that the prophecy foretold was to be rebuilt. The verse in question uses the specific name of the city, Jerusalem. There can be no question, therefore, that we must look to the circumstances under which that city was rebuilt. The specific mentioning of the name "Jerusalem" helps avoid confusion with the rebuilding of the temple within Jerusalem. A city is not a temple and a temple is not a city, although a city may contain a temple or be located near one. This distinction is important because the decree of Cyrus in Ezra 1:2–4 specifically mentions authorization for the rebuilding of the temple but does not mention the city. In response to that decree, and to a supplementary decree by Darius I, the temple was in fact rebuilt (Ezra 6:14–16); but even after its reconstruction the city of Jerusalem still lay in ruins, and this was the condition in which Nehemiah found it in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes I, some 70 years later. The temple was completed in the sixth year of Darius I, 515 B.C., but the city was still unreconstructed in the time of Artaxerxes in the middle of the following century.

We must now attempt to discover the decree that had the effect of leading to the rebuilding of the city. It was not the decree of Cyrus in Ezra 1; nor was it the decree of Darius in Ezra 6, which was in actuality an authorization to carry out the stipulations of the original decree of Cyrus. Both of these decrees dealt with the temple and both of them were brought to their final consummation when the temple was finished. We must look beyond the rebuilding of the temple for the next major building project relating to Jerusalem. There actually were two decrees, or a decree and an authorization, that were involved in this later event, much like the previous two decrees focused on the temple. This new pair of official rulings is found in Ezra 7 and Nehemiah 2. The circumstances and contents of these decrees require close examination in our quest for the starting point of Daniel's time prophecy.

C. The nature of the decree. The decree given to Ezra is recorded in Ezra 7:12–26 as an official decree of Artaxerxes. It is quoted in the text as a copy of the decree in the original Aramaic language. Because the decree of Darius in Ezra 6 actually contains a reiteration of the antecedent decree of Cyrus, the decree of Artaxerxes is longer than that of Darius. The decrees get longer as one goes through the book. The decree of Cyrus in chapter 1 is the shortest, the decree of Darius in chapter 6 is of medium length, and the decree of Artaxerxes in chapter 7 is the longest and should, therefore, be accorded a special measure of importance.

Contributing to its importance is the wide-ranging authority it accorded to Ezra in this decree. By this decree he was not only given privileges to pay for and offer sacrifices in the temple in Jerusalem, but he was also given power to appoint magistrates and judges in the province of Beyond the River. The province of Beyond the River included more than Judea. It included all of Syria that was located west and south of the Upper Euphrates River. Thus by this decree Ezra was given authority not over the Jews alone, but also over the persons and territory outside of Judea (Ezra 7:25). He was also given permission to draw on the treasury of that province up to the amount of 100 talents of silver. (See Ezra 7:21–22.)

Included among Ezra's responsibilities under this decree of Artaxerxes was the authorization to teach the law of His God to Jews and non-Jews alike in the same extended territory. For anyone who would not obey his teachings in these matters he was authorized to execute punishment up to the death penalty. (See Ezra 7:25–26.) His authority over non-Jews is probably the most remarkable feature of the decree. The extent and importance of Ezra's position should be noted carefully in order to understand the nature of his action that followed upon his arrival at Jerusalem.

A second major return of Jews (Ezra 8) took place under this same decree. This was only the second official large-scale return of Jews since the Persian conquest of Babylon, the first being under Cyrus. (See Ezra 1–2.) While a trickle of Jews may have returned between these two events, the full and official nature of this authorized return should be noted. (See Ezra 7:13.) In the same way that an officially decreed return initiated the reconstruction of the temple, this second officially decreed return served as the stimulus to commence the reconstruction of Jerusalem.

D. The results of the decree. Now we come to the question of what Ezra did upon his arrival at Jerusalem. We know that he had to deal with the question of mixed or foreign marriages (see Ezra 9, 10), but what else did he do? His other main activity is recorded in Ezra 4:7–16, in a letter from the western governors to Artaxerxes, the king who had issued the decree. The governors struck a note of alarm, reporting, "be it known to the king that the Jews who came up from you to us have gone to Jerusalem. They are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city; they are finishing the walls and repairing the foundations" (Ezra 4:12). Then the governors went on to threaten the king where it could hurt him most, in the treasury or pocketbook: "If this city is rebuilt and the walls finished, they will not pay tribute, custom, or toll, and the royal revenue will be impaired" (vs. 13).

Some important aspects of this report to the king need to be considered. First, the report is recorded in a letter from the western governors. It is found in Aramaic in the book of Ezra as an official document of the Persian archives (see vss. 7–11). There can be no question about the identity of the king to whom it was addressed. The title to the letter bears the name of Artaxerxes (vs. 11), who allowed a group of Jews to return to Judea. The Jews had stopped to see the governors on their way to Jerusalem (cf. Ezra 4:12 with 8:36). This information fits well with the authorization given to Ezra to draw upon the treasuries of the western provinces. Undoubtedly, the western governors were saddened that their resources had been depleted by authorization from the king. When they wrote their letter, finances were uppermost in their minds.

After stopping for their official visit with the governors the returning Jews had gone on to Jerusalem. The city of Jerusalem is mentioned by name in Ezra 4:12 and its character is described rather extensively by the governors in their report. The only question is, what group of Jews is under discussion? The book of Ezra provides the answer. Ezra brought a group of Jews back from Babylon under authorization from Artaxerxes. The governors then reported to the king that a group of Jewish returnees had come to them and gone on to Jerusalem. Because no other officially authorized return of Jews is known in the Persian period since the time of Cyrus, and certainly no other is known to have taken place in the reign of Artaxerxes, this group is unquestionably the Jews who returned with Ezra. The only way that one can avoid such a conclusion is to posit somebody just like Ezra doing the same work that Ezra did. Such conjecturing is unnecessary.

The logical conclusion that Ezra and his returnees are the group referred to here has been hinted at obliquely by other scholars. For example, L. W. Batten states,

> We note that the Jews here denounced are recent arrivals. There must therefore have been an extensive migration in the time of Artaxerxes, of which we have no other record [sic!]. From their undertakings the company must have been a large one.[5]

F. C. Fensham notes that "the reference to a migration in v 12 probably refers to a return of certain Jews before Nehemiah."[6]

One of the reasons why some scholars have been loathe to accept Ezra as the leader of this group of returnees has to do with the long-discussed question of the sequence of Ezra and Nehemiah. Did Ezra precede Nehemiah or did Nehemiah precede Ezra? Scholars unsure of the answer to this question are, of course, unsure about the identity of the group that preceded Nehemiah back to Jerusalem during the reign of Artaxerxes. But if one agrees to the idea that Ezra preceded Nehemiah, then Ezra and his fellow returnees are the only logical candidates to fit the text. The sequence of Ezra and Nehemiah is too large a question to be discussed here.[7] Suffice it to say that the traditional, classical, and canonical order of Ezra followed by Nehemiah is accepted and utilized here. The Persian period history is described from its beginnings in Ezra but Nehemiah discusses only his own experiences during the reign of an Artaxerxes, the same name of the king with whom the book of Ezra ends. And Nehemiah uses a date later in the reign of that king according to the regnal year number. This also makes good sense out of the references to Ezra in the book of Nehemiah (8:1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 13, RSV; and 19:6, LXX). If one reverses the order of these two men, these references and this narrative needs to be emended or changed in some other fashion. The logical and direct interpretation of the data is that Ezra returned before Nehemiah did and was present for the events of Nehemiah 8 and 9. The book of Ezra tells how he came to be there beforehand.

With this order applied to the events described in Ezra 4:12–23 (but not including verse 24), Ezra now becomes the person who led out in the reconstruction of the city of Jerusalem upon the return of the wave of exiles who came with him during the reign of Artaxerxes I, before the time of Nehemiah. Reconstructing these events in this way, however, creates something of a problem in the order of the text. The return of the Jews under Ezra is described in chapters 7 and 8 but their rebuilding of the city is described in chapter 4. Why are things out of order like this?

It should be pointed out that there is more than one way in which to organize a book, biblical or otherwise, and an author does not always have to subscribe to the strictly chronological approach. He might also follow a topical approach. And this is what has happened here. There is a parenthesis between Ezra 4:5 and 4:24–5:1. The parenthesis continues its own recital along chronological lines, the topic or subtopic being opposition to the Jews. This opposition is cited first for the reign of Cyrus in Ezra 4:1–5, then for the reign of Ahasuerus (or Xerxes) in Ezra 4:6, then for the reign of Artaxerxes in Ezra 4:7–23. Then with Ezra 4:24 the narrative returns to the time of Darius—between the times of Cyrus and Ahasuerus.

The topic treated in this subsection (Ezra 4) is opposition to the Jews. The opposition is in the first case to rebuilding the temple (time of Cyrus), then a more general opposition (time of Xerxes), and finally an opposition to building the city of Jerusalem (time of Artaxerxes). Fensham has given a nice evaluation of this problem, in his statement:

> In spite of this [the chronological order of Persian kings in chapter 4], Rudolph presumes that the Chronicler had no idea of the historical sequence of the Persian kings and mentioned typical names which are accidentally correct chronologically. Rudolph arrives at this conclusion because of the sudden switch to Darius in 4:24.... Thus it is understandable that modern scholars, reasoning from their own logic, should regard the historical reliability of this chapter with suspicion. But there is another kind of perfectly legitimate logic to the reasoning of the author of this chapter: he is referring in this chapter in chronological order to the hindrances placed in the way of Jews to rebuild the temple and the wall of Jerusalem. When he discussed the problems of the building of the temple in 4:1–5, it reminded him of later similar troubles with the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem, and so 4:6–23 has been inserted, almost parenthetically, before the argument of the building of the temple has again been taken up on 4:24ff. (already noted by C. F. Keil in the last century).[8]

Thus there is a perfectly good explanation as to why the decree and the return are described in chapters 7 and 8 but the rebuilding undertaken by the very same people who returned in these chapters is described in chapter 4. There is no conflict. The chapter arrangement merely reflects the author's decision to treat his materials in a topical rather than in a strictly chronological manner.

Two final questions about these events arise before we turn to more specifically chronological matters. The first question is, Why did Ezra undertake the rebuilding of the city when it was not mentioned specifically in the authorizing decree from Artaxerxes? The second question is, Why did Artaxerxes stop the rebuilding if he authorized it and was so favorable to Ezra?

In answering the first question we can simply supply the historical proof. Ezra 4:12, 13 indicates that Ezra did indeed go ahead and undertake the rebuilding. He appears to have made no effort to conceal what he was doing. He did not do it surreptitiously but in full view of the western governors. Given the open nature of the project, one can only say that Ezra understood that the rebuilding fell within the jurisdiction of the authorization given to him. As conscientious an observer of the law of God as he was—and even Artaxerxes noted this point—he made no attempt to deceive anyone in regard to what was being carried out. Ezra had been granted legal and judicial courtroom authority (Ezra 7:25, 26) which needed to involve the establishment of places of judgment. Such places were typically the "gates" of the city wall where the judges met for their judgment activities. There seems to be here a clear indication that Ezra must have provided the building facilities where proper civil judicial activities were to be carried out. Jerusalem was also a religious precinct surrounding the temple area in a sense, and Ezra's authority over legal religious matters seems to have to include also the reconstruction of Jerusalem.

E. Response of the king. What kind of king was Artaxerxes, who reversed his own decree? Historians describe him as two-faced. Probably the classic example of his duplicity occurred in the disposition of Inarus, who rebelled against him in Egypt. After Inarus was defeated and captured by Artaxerxes' general, Megabyzus, in 454 B.C., Artaxerxes promised him safe conduct to Persia and assured him that he would not be executed. Artaxerxes honored this promise for some five years but eventually, at the pleading of the Queen Mother Amestris, he had Inarus impaled. Megabyzus was so upset at the king's perfidy that he raised a revolt in Syria.[9]

Chronology

We now turn to the question of the chronology of the events involved. Once the chronological issues are settled a direct calculation of the date for the Messiah can be proposed and history can be examined to see who fits.

The date for the beginning of this period of the prophecy must coincide with the going forth or issuing of the word or decree that led to the commencement of the reconstruction of Jerusalem. According to the interpretations discussed above, the decree that led to that commencement can be identified as the decree that Artaxerxes I gave to Ezra. Now that decree needs to be dated. The narrative connected with it indicates that Ezra and his fellow returnees left Babylon on the first day of the first month of Artaxerxes' seventh year (Ezra 7:9), or I/1/7. After a journey of four months they came to Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month of the seventh year (vs. 10), or V/1/7. Two main issues are involved here: (1) absolute dates for the reign of Artaxerxes, and (2) the kind of calendar according to which these dates were reckoned.

A. Regnal years of Artaxerxes. Absolute dates for the reign of Artaxerxes I can be established through knowledge of the dates for the two preceding kings, Darius I and Xerxes. The dates for those kings are well known because both men conducted invasions of Greece and Greek historians dated their reigns in terms of the well-understood Olympiad dating system. In addition we have sources from the Ancient Near East which include papyri from Egypt dated to the reign of Artaxerxes and a constant flow of contract tablets written in cuneiform when Babylonia was under Persian control. We also have Ptolemy's Canon, in which the reigns of ancient kings back to the mid-eighth century B.C, were dated and fixed by means of eclipses and astronomical-mathematical calculations. In other words, we are in a very good position to give an accurate fix to the dates for Xerxes and of his son Artaxerxes, who followed him.

1. Classical historical sources. We will start with some of the latest sources and work our way backwards. At least half a dozen classical (Greco-Roman) historians mention something about the time or circumstances surrounding the death of Xerxes. The Greek historian Ctesias tells us the most about the circumstances involving Xerxes' murder by Artabanus, but he does not date the event precisely.[10] Diodorus of Sicily gives us the more precise date for those events, dating both by the Athenian archonship and the Roman consular year. These two types of years overlap to indicate that Xerxes was murdered sometime during the last half of the Julian year 465 B.C.[11]

2. An Egyptian astronomical source. Because the Egyptian solar calendar was one-fourth day short of a true solar year it advanced regularly in relation to the Julian years used to calculate B.C. dates. This feature has been used by modern historians to work out ancient Egyptian dates by figuring backwards in the Egyptian calendar. It was used also by the astronomer Ptolemy in his *Almagest*.[12] For the year in which Xerxes died, 465 B.C., the Egyptian New Year's day, Thoth 1, fell on our December 17. If Xerxes died before December 17, then Artaxerxes' second regnal year would have begun on that day; but instead, Artaxerxes' first year began on December 17, and this means—according to the Egyptian system—that Xerxes died between December 17 and the Persian Babylonian Spring New Year, Nisanu 1, in the spring.

3. Babylonian astronomical source. The Babylonians were aware that solar and lunar eclipses repeated themselves almost exactly in cycles of 18 years. Ancient astronomers called these periods "Saros cycles." Cuneiform tablets recording Saros cycles in terms of the years of reigning kings are known from the Hellenistic period.[13] Tables derived from these tablets measure off these cycles from the ninth year of Xerxes to the sixth year of Artaxerxes to the twenty-fourth year of Artaxerxes. Aside from the fact that modern astronomers can determine when these astronomical phenomena took place, they also measure off for us the number of years between these regnal dates. In this way this cycle dates the 18 years between the ninth year of Xerxes and the sixth year of Artaxerxes to the span between 477 B.C. and 459 B.C. This fixes the year of Xerxes' death and Artaxerxes' accession in 465 B.C.

4. Egypto-Jewish historical sources. Papyri from the fifth century B.C. written in Aramaic by Jewish military mercenaries in Persian employ on the island of Elephantine in Egypt supply us with additional valuable historical and chronological information. These documents carry dates in terms of both of the overlapping Egyptian and Persian-Babylonian calendars. The mathematical junctures at which these two variable calendars intersect with double dates help to fix the dates for the reigns of the kings during which these documents were written. A case of special importance here is Cowley Papyrus No. 6, which was dated to both the twenty-first (and last) year of Xerxes and to the accession year of Artaxerxes.[14] The day and month dates utilized in this document fix its writing to January 2, 464 B.C. This text itself indicates that Xerxes' death had been reported in Egypt by that time. Since the Persian "pony express" type of courier system was in effect by that time, the delivery of that news in Egypt may be located late in 465 B.C. This supports the other indications that Xerxes died late in that year, toward the very end of 465 B.C. (In the previous section we reviewed evidence that he died after December 17, 465 B.C.)

5. Babylonian historical sources. The flow of contract tablets from Babylonian scribes continued under the Persian kings, but our sources have a tendency to thin out toward the later Persian kings of that period. Thus these tablets have not been as helpful as one would wish in terms of pinning down the precise date of the transition between Xerxes and Artaxerxes, in spite of the recent publication of additional collections of these tablets[15] and of catalogs of unpublished collections of these tablets.[16] They do, however, abundantly confirm the previously established pattern which indicates that 465 B.C. was the twenty-first and last year of Xerxes and that Artaxerxes I's first full regnal year began in Nisanu 1 in the spring of 464 B.C. Recent publication of astronomical tablets from the eleventh and twenty-fourth years of Artaxerxes I have provided even more precise support for that same chronological pattern.[17]

6. Summary on Artaxerxes' regnal dates. In summary, we can say that there are a number of very important chronological lines which focus on dating the regnal years of Xerxes and those of his son Artaxerxes I. A knowledge of these dates was never lost, because they were preserved by the classical historians of Greece and Rome and in the tables of Ptolemy's *Almagest*. These documents indicate clearly that 465 B.C. was the twenty-first and last year of Xerxes and that 464 B.C. was the first full official year of Artaxerxes I. Archeological discoveries from late in the nineteenth century and from this present century have provided ample confirmation of the accuracy of those calculations. Support for these dates has been found in the Elephantine papyri and in a more general but still strongly accurate way in the Saros tablets and the compilation of Babylonian contract tablets from the Persian period. There need be no doubt for anyone familiar with the available chronological sources that we have the regnal years of Artaxerxes I accurately fixed. Indeed, the dates are so well set in the cement of these sources that it is hard to imagine any kind of future discovery that could possibly move them.

B. The calendar for calculation of the king's years. Having established the absolute dates for the reign of Artaxerxes, we come now to the point of how the Jews of Ezra's time used contemporary dating methods. Ezra, living under this same Artaxerxes as a citizen of Babylonia, knew very well when Xerxes was killed and when Artaxerxes took the throne. Thus, when he dated his own return to Judea in the seventh year of Artaxerxes (Ezra 7), he was making use of this living, active, and on-going chronological information. The only question is whether he used that information, according to the Persian and Babylonian system of dating, or according to his own Jewish calendar.

The difference can be illustrated quite simply. The Babylonian calendar year began with the month of Nisanu (Jewish Nisan) in the spring of the year, March–April in our calendar. If Ezra followed the Babylonian system, which continued to be used by the Persian kings, he dated the regnal years of Artaxerxes, including the seventh year mentioned in Ezra 7, as beginning in the spring. By way of contrast, there was the Jewish civil calendar which began in the fall with Tishri 1 (Tashritu of the Babylonians). In the case which we are considering, this provides us with a difference of 6 months.

If Ezra began Artaxerxes' years according to the Persian Babylonian system then his first regnal year of Artaxerxes began in the spring of 464 B.C. But if Ezra began Artaxerxes' years according to the Jewish civil year then his first year began in the fall of 464 B.C. In both systems a king's first *regnal* year began on the system's New Year's day. The period between the moment when a king died and a new king officially came to the throne on his first New Year's day was known as his *accession* year. In Ezra and Nehemiah we are dealing with regnal years only.

These considerations affect the date for the beginning of the seventy-week prophecy, because we have looked to the decree of Ezra 7 as representing the going forth of the "word" in response to which the reconstruction of the city of Jerusalem began. Ezra says that he left Babylon on I/1/7 of Artaxerxes and arrived in Jerusalem four months later, on V/1/7 of Artaxerxes. (See Ezra 7:7–9.) If he gave these dates according to the Persian-Babylonian spring-to-spring year, then they fell in the spring and summer of the year 458 B.C. The decree would then have been given before Nisan 1 of 458 B.C., or sometime in the sixth year of Artaxerxes, 459–458 B.C. But if these events are calculated according to the Jewish civil year, which began with Tishri 1 in the fall of 458 B.C., then the decree would probably have been given during that winter of 458–457 B.C., and the journey took place during the spring and summer of 457 B.C. (In the case of the fall-to-fall year, the month numbers do not change. They run VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, XII, I, II, III, IV, V, VI.)

The matter may be boiled down to the fact that, if Ezra was using the Persian-Babylonian calendar, the decree and the return occurred in 458 B.C.; whereas, if the decree and the return were dated by Ezra according to the Jewish civil year, they fell in 457 B.C. Which of these two alternatives is correct and why? The overwhelming evidence is in favor of Ezra's use of the Jewish fall calendar, as the paragraphs below will reveal.

1. The Jewish fall calendar during the united monarchy. First, it should be noted that there were two calendars in use in ancient Israel, the religious calendar that began (like the Babylonian calendar) in the spring, and the civil calendar that began in the fall. The Jewish new year of Rosh Hashanah, that survives in the liturgical calendar of synagogues today, is a survival of the civil calendar. The use of the fall calendar for civil or political purposes goes back to the time of Solomon. As E. R. Thiele has shown so effectively, the regnal years of Solomon as they were applied to the record of building his palace and the temple were dated by a fall calendar.[18]

2. The Jewish fall calendar during the divided monarchy. When we compare together the various synchronisms and the regnal year records in 1-2 Kings, we see that the use of the fall calendar predominated in the south, in the kingdom of Judah, while the spring calendar was more commonly used in the northern kingdom of Israel.[19]

3. The Jewish fall calendar at the end of the divided monarchy. The use of the fall calendar in Judah can be elucidated with special detail at the end of the kingdom of Judah, during the years of its last kings as they went down to defeat at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar and his troops from Babylon. The use of a fall calendar in these records of 2 Kings can be demonstrated especially well because the biblical text gives not only the years of the kings of Judah involved, but it also gives some references to the years of king Nebuchadnezzar. With the publication of Nebuchadnezzar's own royal chronicles down to the year 593 B.C.,[20] the dates in the Bible and in those chronicles can be compared. When such a comparison is carried out, it can be demonstrated that the writer of 2 Kings was indeed using the fall calendar of the Jews to calculate these dates.[21] Only in such a way can these biblical and extrabiblical dates be harmonized.

The use of the fall calendar for the civil or regnal years of the kings who reigned in Jerusalem can be demonstrated at the outset from the biblical dates for Solomon. Their use continued through the divided monarchy, as demonstrated by the synchronisms in the biblical record, and they are readily evident as checked with an extrabiblical source at the end of the Judahite monarchy.

4. The Jewish fall calendar during the Babylonian exile. The fall calendar continued in use among the Jews in exile in Babylon. This is evident from the system of dating employed in the book of Ezekiel, the prophet who wrote from exile in Babylon. He did not date his visions saccording to the regnal years of the Babylonian kings under whom he lived, but rather dated them according to the years of the exile of the Jews. This is apparent from the date in the title to the book found in Ezekiel 1:2; 8:1; 40:1.

5. The Jewish fall calendar after the Babylonian exile. We come now to Ezra himself. Is there any evidence from his book that he used a fall calendar? Unfortunately, there is not; however, we have precisely that kind of information in Nehemiah 1, 2. Because Nehemiah was a contemporary and compatriot of Ezra's, the use of a fall calendar in Nehemiah's book can be taken as strong evidence that Ezra used it too. What then is the evidence for the fall calendar in Nehemiah?

In the first chapter of Nehemiah we are presented with circumstances in which Nehemiah found himself at the court of Artaxerxes. He had received recent news that Jerusalem had been damaged and burned. (See Neh 1:1–3.) We should emphasize that this was recent news about recent events. Nehemiah was not talking about what Nebuchadnezzar did to the city more than a century before.

If we understand that Ezra had already gotten the reconstruction of the city underway when he returned (see Ezra 4:12–16), then some later assault upon the city would be what Nehemiah was concerned about. Seeing Nehemiah's distress, the king inquired about its cause. When he found out, the king authorized him to go to Jerusalem and tend to the matters there himself.

Of chronological interest in this narrative is the way in which the two dates involved are stated. Nehemiah 1:1 dates Nehemiah's receipt of the news concerning Jerusalem in the ninth month of Artaxerxes' twentieth year. The authorization given to Nehemiah to attend to these matters was of course given later, yet according to Nehemiah 2:1 it was given in the *first* month of the same twentieth year of Artaxerxes! There can be only one way in which to explain these dates historically as they stand, that is, that they were reckoned upon the basis of a fall-to-fall year which began in the seventh month—for as we noticed a few paragraphs ago, in the fall-to-fall year the number of the months ran VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, XII, I, II, III, IV, V, VI. Thus in the fall-to-fall year the first month came six months *after* the seventh month.

As the text stands, and this is the basis upon which scholars should draw their conclusions, these dates in Nehemiah 1, 2 present the strongest possible evidence that Nehemiah used a fall-to-fall calendar, and that, therefore, it is most reasonable to conclude that his contemporary colleague Ezra did too.

6. The Jewish fall calendar during the contemporary Egyptian exile. A final supplementary line of evidence is found in the Elephantine papyri, a second batch of which was published in 1953. Among these papyri is one which has direct implications for the type of regnal year that was employed by Jews who served in Egypt. Kraeling papyrus No. 6 contains dates which locate it in the month Tammuz, the fourth month of the Jewish year (or July) 420 B.C. Kraeling papyrus No. 7 is dated to Tishri (or October) of the same year 420 B.C. But the regnal year number of Darius II, under whom these texts were written, changes between the texts from year 3 of the July papyrus to year 4 of the October papyrus. This change means that the year number of the king, according to the usage of the people who wrote these papyri, changed at the fall new year of Tishri 1 rather than of the spring new year of Nisan 1.

This has been examined and explained in detail by Siegfried Horn[22] in his study of these and related texts. Thus, while Ezra and Nehemiah used the Jewish fall calendar in their documents, other Jews exiled in Egypt were also using it a quarter of a century later in their part of the diaspora.

7. Summary of the use of the Jewish fall calendar. To summarize, it may be noted that the Hebrew monarchy started out using the fall calendar for the regnal years of Solomon and continued to use it in the kingdom of Judah. Its use is specifically demonstrated by a comparison between 2 Kings and extrabiblical documents at the end of the monarchy. Jews carried the fall calendar into exile with them into Babylon and continued to use it there, as evidenced by the dates in Ezekiel. In the postexilic period Nehemiah, Ezra's fellow worker, provides direct textual evidence of the use of this kind of calendar. Other exiles elsewhere also continued to use the same fall calendar. Thus the conclusion that Ezra used a fall-to-fall calendar for the dates in his book rests upon very solid ground. This means that "the seventh year of Artaxerxes" in Ezra 7 is 457 B.C. rather than 458 B.C. as would be suggested if he had been using a spring calendar.

C. Conclusions on chronology. Through these two chronological procedures, a search for an absolute date for the regnal years of Artaxerxes and an examination of the question of which kind of calendar Ezra used, we have arrived at 457 B.C. as the date for the decree of Artaxerxes in Ezra 7. Because this was the decree which led to the commencement of the reconstruction of the city of Jerusalem, we have come to an absolute date for the specification for the prophecy of Daniel 9:25. That passage may now be paraphrased to identify its starting point as, "From the going forth of the word (the decree of Artaxerxes I) to restore and to rebuild Jerusalem (by Ezra according to the decree of Ezra 7 and the actions of Ezra 4), in 457 B.C...."

D. Nehemiah's decree. Two final points need to be made in relation to the "decree" to Nehemiah recorded in Nehemiah 2. The first has to do with its relationship to the antecedent decree of Ezra. Actually, this later communication was not quite on the same level as the official decree given earlier to Ezra. Nehemiah was given a letter that authorized him to receive recognition and assistance for the tasks that the king permitted him to perform. It had the net effect of a decree, but it was not quite the same thing. The relation between the two communications was that of initial authorization and supplementary authorization. What Ezra started was taken up and carried to partial completion by Nehemiah. As in the preceding case of Cyrus' initial decree in Ezra 1 and Darius' supplementary authorization in Ezra 6, Artaxerxes' two decrees in Ezra 7 and Nehemiah 2 can be seen as a pair. In both cases, the initial decree led to the commencement of the project, but both reconstruction projects required supplementary authorization to complete them; with the temple in the first case and the city in the second.

E. Alternate interpretations. Because it really was the first decree of the second set, the one given to Ezra in 457 B.C., which led to the commencement of the construction of the city, is the decree to which we should look for fixing the point for the start of the prophetic and historical period outlined by Daniel. But some Evangelical commentators hold that we should work instead from the date of 444 B.C. (the communication given to Nehemiah) to begin this period. In order for this period to predict when Jesus of Nazareth would become the Messiah, however, those beginning in 444 B.C. are forced to shorten it. A full 483 years from 444 B.C. overshoots the ministry and death of Jesus by at least five years by almost any standard.[23] There is no way to reconcile the date 444 B.C. and to have the 490 years terminate anywhere close to the time of Jesus Christ's death.

Conclusion

When the procedures described above are carried out, it can be seen that the prophecy of the 69 weeks, or the 483 full historical years of Daniel 9, culminates in A.D. 27. The final question of this study is, What do the words "unto the Messiah the Prince" mean? They should indicate the time for the coming of the Messiah. It should be noted carefully what a Messiah is. According to its verbal root, Messiah means an anointed one. Thus the Messiah is one who is anointed. Before being anointed the person involved was not fully the Messiah yet. Thus we are not talking here about the time of the Messiah's birth or the time of His death; we are talking about the time when He would appear as the Messiah. There is one person and only one who fulfills this requirement, and that is the one who was anointed as the Messiah in A.D. 27—Jesus of Nazareth. His anointing at the Jordan River by both John the Baptist and His heavenly Father, took place in the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar according to Luke 3:1, 21, 22. While there are other possible ways of reckoning this regnal year of Tiberius,[24] it certainly is a reasonable and standard procedure accepted by many commentators, chronographers, and historians to reckon it from A.D. 12. Utilizing that procedure and starting from the beginning point established above in 457 B.C. lead us to one specific individual as the Messiah of this prophecy—Jesus Christ. In other words, the establishment of 457 B.C. as the starting point of the 70-week prophecy of Daniel 9 is one of the strongest indicators among the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament that Jesus truly was all that He claimed to be.

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